THE NOVELS OF MURIEL SPARK: INTERTEXTUAL READINGS

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ABSTRACT

Muriel Spark's novels engage with a wide variety of other texts, embracing both "popular" and "high" cultural forms. They display a democratic enjoyment of the popular and of story-telling while at the same time adapting established formulas to serious purposes. Theories of intertextuality therefore provide a rewarding approach to her novels. The functioning of their humour is compatible with Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of the dialogic and the carnivalistic, but Julia Kristeva's formulation of the operation of intertextuality indicates that readings derived from it would go against the grain of a Catholic novelist's enterprise. However, Muriel Spark's novels can be seen to participate in rather than resist deconstructive explorations of meaning. A frank admission that texts are based on other texts and an acceptance of conventions as points of departure is comparable with Christian belief in something external to the self. The challenge to orthodoxy favoured by Kristeva may, in a bourgeois culture, take the form of resistance to a humanist emphasis on individualism and Romantic notions of originality. The idea that God is accessible only through texts endorses the importance of textuality and supports the capacity of fiction to engage with debates about the limits of indeterminacy. In this study discussion of theory is linked to close readings of individual novels. Different kinds of intertexts are considered - those which may be termed cultural attitudes, such as concepts of the self and ideas of place, as well as written ones. Attention is also given to the impact of the rhetorical strategies adopted, and to the connection between subverting narrative conventions and challenging received opinions. This necessitates recognition of the contribution of the novels to debates about political power, their use of satire as a weapon, and their demand on readers to play an active role in determining their moral significance.

In memory of

George, Betty and Ralph Garratt

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis is all my own. The views expressed are mine and not those of the University of Bristol.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The word "intertextuality" is deserving of the apology given by Jeanine Parisier Plottel in 1978:

> Intertextuality is a fashionable word in academic literary circles. This is to be expected when we consider that the word implies a subtle sensation of very special learnedness and pomposity. ...Another shorter term would surely be more desirable...[1]

The word may no longer be so fashionable, nor so strange, but it has not been superseded by one that is shorter and less pompous. It still serves a purpose and, as I hope to show, designates an approach to literary texts that is rewarding. The word was coined by Julia Kristeva who explains it thus:

> ...the *text* is defined as a trans-linguistic apparatus that redistributes the order of language by relating communicative speech, which aims to inform directly, to different kinds of anterior or synchronic utterances. ...it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality...[2]

She goes on to refer to culture as a 'general text', and her formulations have continued to provide a theoretical basis for others working in this territory[3]. The concept of intertextuality impinges on two contentious areas in literary theory concerning, firstly, the notion of "interpretation" and, secondly, what constitutes the object to be studied. Discussion of these two areas will clarify the concept of intertextuality which informs my reading of Muriel Spark's novels.

Pierre Macherey asserts that interpretation is a reductive activity:

> The writer [of fiction] is constantly obliged to solve several problems at once, at different levels, and each choice affects all the others. Interpretation simply

> offers a reductive explanation by identifying just one of these choices...[4]

He also says:

> And since the text is fiction rather than illusion it resists interpretation, resists being reduced to non-literary forms of expression. As we shall see, knowledge is not interpretation but explication.[5]

The views of Stanley Fish would appear to be diametrically opposed to Macherey's:

> I want to argue that there always is a text (just as there always is an ordinary world) but that what is in it can change, and therefore at no level is it independent of and prior to interpretation.[6]

In part at least the disagreement between them arises from a difference between their uses of the word "interpretation". For Macherey the word refers to a process of searching for hidden meanings, a process which leads critics to construct their own texts rather than attend to the complexity of the fictive work before them. It also implies a total explanation of the entire text and not an attempt to explicate certain features of fictive works by drawing on specific kinds of knowledge. Fish, on the other hand, uses the word to designate the process by which we 'make sense' of any speech act. They both acknowledge that for any text to be intelligible there must be shared conditions or 'principles of rationality' [Macherey] between producer and consumer. But whereas Fish focuses on the conditions which lead to particular readings of texts, Macherey argues that to concentrate on consumption is to engage in a 'sociology of culture'[7]; for him the proper focus of a literary study is the literary work and the 'determinate conditions' of its production, conditions which are manifested within, not outside, the work:

> ...we can only describe, only remain within the work, if we also decide to go beyond it: to bring out, for

example, what the work is *compelled* to say in order to say what it *wants* to say, ...Thus it is not a question of introducing a historical explanation which is stuck onto the work from the outside. On the contrary, we must show a sort of splitting within the work...[8]

What is at stake between them is not just a question of definitions. Fish's assertion that texts can change indicates that for him there is no "text" independent of acts of consumption. For Macherey the literary text is fixed, even though in order for it to become knowable it has to be constructed as an object by the reader.

Theories of intertextuality necessarily engage with issues concerning interpretation. The idea that in any act of reading a multiplicity of different kinds of "text" converge requires recognition of differences between the situations of individual readers. But once this acknowledgement has been made, either the focus of study becomes those readers, or the starting point has to be the written texts. As Macherey says, if the study is to be literary rather than sociological, the written text constitutes the object to be scrutinized. Muriel Spark's stance as a critic is in agreement with his ideas; she wrote, 'it is the critic's job to attend to the text, not to insert modifications'[9]. In the Tanner Lectures given at Cambridge in 1990 Umberto Eco supports adherence to the literary work as the focus of investigation:

> Between the mysterious history of a textual production and the uncontrollable drift of its future readings, the text qua text still represents a comfortable presence, the point to which we can stick.[10]

In my discussion of Muriel Spark's novels, following the principle that it is to be a literary study, I will base my observations on the texts themselves and the different kinds of intertexts they invoke. This does not exclude from consideration the likely impact on readers of the

rhetorical strategies they deploy. As Roland Barthes indicates in 'Myth Today', taking the texts themselves as a starting point does not evade the complexity of reading processes. He argues that because of the inherent 'duplicity' of signifiers it is possible to produce different readings by focussing either on their 'meaning' or on their 'form' or on both at the same time[11]. Although he is specifically exploring the construction of myths, his account gives a semiotic basis for the generation of alternative interpretations which explains both their interest and their inevitability.

Responding to Umberto Eco's Tanner Lectures, Jonathan Culler elaborated on the possible aims of literary interpretation:

> Many works of literary criticism are interpretations in that they talk about particular works, but their aim may be less to reconstruct the meaning of those works than to explore the mechanisms or structures by which they function and thus to illuminate general propositions about literature, narrative, figurative language, theme, and so on.[12]

This offers a far more satisfactory model of interpretation than the one deplored by Macherey. Consideration of the mechanism of intertextuality as it operates in specific instances is one way of exploring some 'general propositions about literature'.

Macherey's warning against using historical information which is external to the text as a means of explanation accords with the idea that to give any text explanatory power over another results in reductive interpretation. One of the most common forms this can take is the use of biographical information about the author. An extreme formulation of the irrelevance of the author is given by Michael Riffaterre: 'The largest body of writing that one

can conceive of as the object of literary analysis should be the text, not a collection of texts'[13]. His objection to considering the oeuvre of a writer follows from his exclusion of the author as an entity separable from any individual text. Like Wolfgang Iser, with his 'implied author', and Umberto Eco, with his 'model author', he accepts that one of the legitimate activities of a reader is to construct an author from the text. While accepting the concept of an implied author, I question the validity, and even the possibility, of excluding from consideration the empirical author. Feminist criticism has dealt centrally with the effect the gender of the empirical author has on the way texts are read. The actual or presumed nationality, race and class, of the author could also be instanced as factors affecting response. Any information about the empirical author possessed by the reader constitutes one of the "texts" which is brought to the encounter with the literary text. Provided this is recognized and care is taken to avoid giving one text explanatory power over another, it seems needlessly extreme to eliminate the concept of "Muriel Spark" and her oeuvre from consideration.

Michael Riffaterre defines an "intertext" as 'one or more texts which the reader must know in order to understand a work of literature in terms of its overall significance'[14]. The 'must' here is startlingly dogmatic and in contrast with the more open and playful account given by Roland Barthes in *The Pleasure of the Text*:

> I savor the sway of formulas, the reversal of origins, the ease which brings the anterior text out of the subsequent one. ...Proust is what comes to me, not what I summon up; not an "authority," simply a *circular memory*. Which is what the inter-text is: the impossibility of living outside the infinite text - whether this text be Proust or the daily newspaper or

> the television screen: the book creates the meaning, the meaning creates life.[15]

This account insufficiently acknowledges the attempt readers make to distinguish between fortuitous associations and ones which they consider operative within the textual construction of meaning. Nevertheless, Barthes's emphasis on the pleasure generated by the evocation of one text by another is a valuable corrective to an over-rigid and solemn approach to reading. Judith Still and Michael Worton are helpful in distinguishing between the positions adopted by the two theorists:

> In recent articles Riffaterre has made it clear that we must distinguish between *aleatory* intertextuality (which is not unlike Barthes's notion of 'circular memory' and which allows the reader to read a text through the prism of all and any familiar texts) and *obligatory* intertextuality which demands that the reader take account of a hypogrammatic origin.[16]

There is concern, which they go on to acknowledge, about the status of the 'obligatory' if it goes unnoticed by the reader. Riffaterre himself says, 'There cannot be an intertext without our awareness of it'[17]. Presumably the 'obligatory' intertexts will vary from reader to reader just as the 'aleatory' do. Nevertheless, some intertexts are invoked so specifically that there can be little danger of failing to recognise them whether they are 'obligatory' - for example the reference to Cellini's autobiography in *Loitering With Intent* - or 'aleatory' - the reference in *Territorial Rights* to whatever "text" of Venice the reader happens to possess. My intention is to deal with both kinds and to focus on what is conspicuous in the novels rather than seek out concealed or relatively arbitrary associations.

It is notable that most discussions of intertextuality refer to texts already possessed by readers. However, the

impetus to acquire further information is one of the effects of reading and an important dimension of the interpenetration of texts. This is particularly so when a reference is made obvious, as is so often the case in Muriel Spark's novels. Inevitably this has been my own experience, but it has not seemed worth commenting on the distinction between references which reminded me of knowledge I already had and ones which prompted further investigation, except in the context of this general consideration of reading and intertextuality.

Naturally, what is conspicuous to one reader may be unnoticed by another. If this were not so, there would be little point in engaging in the activity of criticism. It is because each interpreter brings to the literary text a different conceptual framework, or set of "texts", that the resulting readings are of interest to others. Glenda Norquay in her unpublished doctoral thesis, *Moral Absolutism in the novels of Robert Louis Stevenson, Robin Jenkins and Muriel Spark: Challenges to Realism*[18], is able to provide interpretations of Muriel Spark's novels that are both unusual and convincing by bringing to their reading a knowledge of Scottish Calvinism. What convinces is that Calvinism does not appear to be imposed on the texts from outside but is seen to be in the texts for those who possess the knowledge which enables recognition. It is also undeniable that if the author of the novels were not known to be Scottish a critic would be unlikely to assume the relevance of that particular knowledge. Thus the text of the author possessed by the reader inflects the act of reading.

Julia Kristeva conceives of the functioning of intertextuality as dynamic, allowing possibilities of change and transformation. She acknowledges a debt to Mikhail Bakhtin in the formulation of her ideas:

Writer as well as "scholar," Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure. What allows a dynamic dimension to structuralism is his conception of the "literary word" as an *intersection of textual surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character), and the contemporary or earlier cultural context.[19]

(Shortly afterwards she refers to 'an anterior or synchronic literary corpus'[20] as though the cultural context and the existing body of literature are interchangeable; presumably the point is that the former includes the latter.) For both Kristeva and Bakhtin, the possibility within writing of a revolutionary politics, or rather, of certain kinds of writing *being* revolutionary, is of importance. One of the dynamic functions of intertextuality dealt with by Bakhtin is the capacity to contest pre-existing forms through parody:

> The novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it sqeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, re-formulating and re-accentuating them.[21]

He links the contestation of conventional forms to a more general challenge to authority. A consideration of the attitudes to convention and authority embodied in the formal aspects of a text is one way of exploring its political import. For this reason I will devote a whole chapter to the discussion of genre in Muriel Spark's novels.

One of Bakhtin's most important contributions to literary study is his emphasis on the serious functioning of humour, on the "carnivalesque". This aspect of his work is

potentially of great interest to the study of Muriel Spark's comic novels and I will draw on his ideas in the discussion which follows. Part of his analysis of the relation between novels and pre-existing genres is concerned with the link he sees between novels, the comic and the dialogic:

> This ability of the novel to criticize itself is a remarkable feature of this ever-developing genre.
>
> What are the salient features of this novelization of other genres suggested by us above? They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the "novelistic" layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humour, elements of self-parody and finally - this is the most important thing - the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present).[22]

The bringing together in this formulation of intertextuality within the novel and its parodic, anti-authoritarian functioning clarifies the potential for contestation. It is important to add that although the claims made are generalized, Bakhtin's writing on Dostoevsky makes the point that not all novels achieve the same level of dialogism and hence of challenge to authority.

But that the challenge cannot exist without invoking the authority is affirmed by theories of intertextuality. Michael Riffaterre brings out this doubleness:

> ...intertextuality enables the text to represent, at one and the same time, the following pairs of opposites (within each of which the first item corresponds to the

> intertext): convention and departures from it, tradition and novelty, sociolect and idiolect, the already said and its negation or transformation.[23]

It is not possible to evade this doubleness when using language, but it is possible to be more or less knowing and explicit about the use of intertexts. Christian Metz argues powerfully in favour of filmic texts which acknowledge explicitly the conventions on which they draw:

> The classical western was healthy not because it spoke of horses and great open spaces but because it was frank. It belonged to the category of the great controlled genres that, plausible or not in the details of their peripatetics, in any case never seem to be true, for they never pretend to be anything other than discourses - the fairy tale, the epic, the myth, the oriental theatre, etc., as well as large portions of classicism.
>
> The plausible work, on the contrary, lives out its conventions - and even its very nature as a fiction - in bad conscience (but, as we know, in good faith).[24]

It is interesting to see the moral grounds for his rejection of realism, or 'plausibility'. A comparison with self-reflective fiction, notably E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*, reveals a similarity of conviction that the only way to avoid lying is to deny the possibility of telling "the truth"; fiction is preferred because the self-confessed lie allows others to determine its truth-value. In an interview with Frank Kermode Muriel Spark is reported as expressing the same convictions:

> I don't claim that my novels are truth - I claim that they are fiction out of which a kind of truth emerges.[25]

But in fact if we are going to live in the world as reasonable beings, we must call it lies. But simply

> because one puts it out as a work of fiction, then one is not a liar.[26]

There is a parallel with E. L. Doctorow's comment on the writing of fiction:

> But we are to be trusted because ours is the only profession forced to admit that it lies - and that bestows upon us the mantle of honesty.[27]

This is not a recent insight; it can be traced back to Sir Philip Sidney's, 'Now, for the poet, he nothing affirmes, and therefore never lyeth'[28], and his formulation of the idea that fiction is 'an imaginative groundplot of a profitable invention'[29]. The significance of these intertextual comparisons lies less in the fact that the convictions are shared than in the impact such convictions have on writing. Both novelists make evident the status of their texts as fiction and take conventionalized genres as points of departure. Their work is 'frank' rather than 'plausible'; it highlights the existence of intertexts and the doubleness of language.

In an essay on Anne Brontë's poetry Muriel Spark says, 'Her Gondal poetry is as rich in imagery, profundity and originality as her personal verses are wanting in these qualities'[30]. She takes issue with Charlotte Brontë's assessment that the 'personal' verses represent the authentic voice of Anne. What is of interest here is the argument that writing which adopts a conventionalized genre may be more original, less indebted to unconscious influence, than writing which pretends to be based on personal experience (an instance of bad conscience rather than bad faith?). Muriel Spark implies a connection between the liberating potential of literary convention and of religious belief:

> I had written nothing for over a year and in the meantime had entered the Roman Catholic Church - an important step for me, because from that time I began

> to see my life as a whole rather than as a series of disconnected happenings. I think it was this combination of circumstances which made it possible for me to attempt my first novel.[31]

When I began this study I assumed that belief in Roman Catholicism was incompatible with intertextuality as defined by Julia Kristeva in that it imposes a limit to indeterminacy. It was my intention to examine this tension as well as the overt references to intertexts in Muriel Spark's novels. While this is still part of my intention, it has become increasingly apparent that there are ways in which they are mutually supportive, that an acceptance of belief in something external to the self and existing prior to the self is consistent with a frank admission of the conventionality of language and the inescapability of intertexts. This has resulted in a shift of emphasis towards considering how far Muriel Spark's novels are themselves deconstructive and whether they demolish or endorse limits on indeterminacy.

In *The World and the Book* Gabriel Josipovici, like Christian Metz, reveals a preference for literary works which escape from realism, or the anecdotal. Metz refers to 'the Plausible' as 'that damp, intimate face of alienation, that unconfessed mutilation of the saying and the said...'[32], and this emphasis on the impoverishment of the 'unconfessed' occurs in Josipovici's analysis:

> To imagine, like the traditional novelist, that one's work is an image of the real world, to imagine that one can communicate directly to the reader what it is that one uniquely feels, that is to fall into the real solipsism, which is, to paraphrase Kierkegaard on despair, not to know that one is in a state of solipsism.[33]

Josipovici's commentary on Proust suggests that writing which acknowledges its own condition, which includes the

inevitability of alienation, is able to 'reveal and make sensible the *laws* which govern existence'[34]; description and anecdote are not ends in themselves nor guarantees of authenticity but the means by which underlying patterns may be made manifest. The rejection of the anecdotal is linked to the rejection of Romantic notions of the importance of the individual and of personal experience. Instead, to accept the trans-personal and engage with conventionalized forms can be to participate in a debate about laws of existence. This suggests that what needs to be explored in relation to the novels of Muriel Spark is the connection between their formal attributes, the particular kinds of stories selected, and their capacity to articulate, or construct, theories about our existence.

The concept of indeterminacy is vexed and troubling. In an interesting article John Frow has this to say about intertextuality and its discontents:

> In its early elaboration by Kristeva, Barthes and others it was not restricted to particular textual manifestations of signifying systems but was used, rather, to designate the way in which a culture is structured as a complex network of codes with heterogeneous and dispersed forms of textual realisation. It formulated the codedness or textuality of what had previously been thought in non-semiotic terms (consciousness, experience, wisdom, story, gender, culture, and so on).
>
> The crucial step here is that from thinking intertextuality in relation to a *cultural* text to thinking social structure as a whole through the metaphor of textuality.[35]

While not disputing this conception he is concerned that it makes it impossible to deal with 'what it is that conditions the textual'[36]. The problem is a political one;

what kind of morality is legitimate if there is nothing against which texts can be tested? He has two proposals to escape this apparent impasse, the first being that power relations within textuality should be attended to:

> This indifferentiation of the concept of a generalised intertextuality can be resolved only by rethinking textuality in terms of its intrication in asymmetrical and unequal relations of force which would not, however, be simply external to the textual.[37]

His argument allows for the possibility of political choices and advocacy even within a social structure conceived of as textualized. Unless texts are capable of wielding some kind of power, and this depends on unequal power relations between them, the capacity for radical contestation and transformation conceived of by Bakhtin and Kristeva is a chimera. Frank Lentricchia argues that there is no doubt about the existence of such power relations with the attendant political consequences:

> Literary discourse in the wake of Foucault no longer needs to be forced into contact with political and social discourses, as if these were realms outside of literature which writers must be dragged into by well-meaning critics. For as an act of power marked and engaged by other discursive acts of power, the intertextuality of literary discourse is a sign not only of the necessary historicity of literature but, more importantly, of its fundamental entanglement with all discourses.[38]

But these acts of power depend on preferences and choices; they may be inescapable but the problem of external justification remains. Presumably Muriel Spark, the empirical author, has resolved this problem by her acceptance of the external authority of God. It remains to be considered how her novels concern themselves with indeterminacy and its limits; I also hope to show that they are concerned with 'relations of force' and to

consider how rhetorical strategies support their textual power.

The second proposal made by John Frow is that we should be wary of constructs which allow us to ignore 'the hard resistance of other and disparate domains of discourse'[39]. The suggestion that the existence of such domains should be admitted even if we can know them only through texts resembles Frederic Jameson's formulation of history:

> We would therefore propose the following revised formulation: that history is *not* a text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativization in the political unconscious.[40]

This formulation could be applied to God. For a Christian, God is not a text but is accessible only through texts. Muriel Spark's novels refer to sacred texts and have also been seen as analogous to such texts. Their use of religious intertexts is self-evidently an important subject and one which forms the substance of my next chapter.

Jonathan Culler in *The Pursuit of Signs* draws attention to a difficulty encountered by critics who wish to use the 'contention that meaning is made possible by a general, anonymous intertextuality'[41] while respecting the scholarly practice of citing evidence. He refers in particular to a discrepancy between Julia Kristeva's theory and her practice, for he maintains that the practice tends to focus on specific, quotable sources whereas the theory emphasizes the vague and indeterminate. He suggests that one solution to the critic's difficulty is the adoption of 'multiple strategies'[42]; another is to give priority to linguistic models. His analysis of

Riffaterre's work points to another tension, this time between semiotics and interpretation. He gives an account of the temptations that may beset the semiotician:

> The fact that one's labours, if successful, will lead to an explicit account of what is implicitly known, explains why the semiotician may be tempted by interpretation. Why not offer new readings instead of trying to explain the conditions of old readings? Why not, after all, do both?[43]

Because of Culler's warnings about difficulties and confusions, I think it necessary to state that my interest in intertextuality is not primarily linguistic or semiotic. What I hope to do is use theories of intertextuality as a way of exploring the workings of Muriel Spark's novels; the aim is both to interpret and to reflect on the processes by which we reach interpretations. I take heart from Culler's defence, quoted earlier[44], of the potential compatibility of these aspirations. It is important that any interpretations offered are not perceived as final or total. In this respect I am sympathetic to David Morse's concept of 'scanning' (if not with his denial of intrinsic complexity):

> But the complexity of a text is not intrinsic: rather it is constructed through its interface with other texts and semiotic systems. ...An analysis of such a multi-faced social, cultural and ideological positioning of the text offers no finality. It seeks an understanding that is not viewed as an unveiling or grasping of the object in all its intrinsic quiddity, but as a constant and mobile process of *scanning*.[45]

However, here too it may not be possible to avoid practice that appears inconsistent with theory. Stanley Fish asserts that, 'while relativism is a position one can entertain, it is not a position one can occupy'[46]. In

other words, I am bound to *believe* that my reading of a text is the correct one even if I *know* it is not.

My treatment of texts in the following chapters is neither chronological nor inclusive. Instead the chapters are based on different kinds of intertextuality and different intertexts. These include ones which are cultural as well as those where specific written texts can be cited; I have tried to deal with the problem of the indeterminacy of cultural intertexts by singling out for consideration some of those associated with specific places as well as with concepts of the "self". The material discussed is highly selective, but since the possibility of establishing *the* interpretation of any text has been denied, to give partial readings of selected novels will, I hope, be both legitimate and indicative. Each sub-section concentrates on one novel because of the desire to do justice to the formal complexity of structure and the intertextual patternings of Muriel Spark's novels. Brief introductory statements to the next four chapters explain the principles which governed selection. In general I have tended to concentrate on later novels, partly because they have so far received less critical attention, but principally because of their intrinsic interest. An acknowledgement which should be made is that just as novels derive from conventionalized forms and ideas, so criticism depends on its intertexts and is implicated in the processes that it observes. Without pretending to olympian detachment, by focussing on intertextuality as a rhetorical strategy I aim to indicate how certain meanings can emerge from the bringing together of different texts when they are activated through the process of reading.

CHAPTER TWO: THE TEXT OF GOD OR GOD AS TEXT

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In *The Mandelbaum Gate* the sentence, 'People should definitely not quote the scriptures at each other' recurs as a leitmotif imbued with irony. It highlights the frequency with which the scriptures are quoted in this novel and underlines the offence to British notions of decorum. The writer signals that she has no wish to behave like a polite house-guest and just be agreeably entertaining; Philip Toynbee reports that Muriel Spark said in an interview, 'One of my motives is to provoke the reader; to startle as well as to please'[1]. She acknowledges in *The Mandelbaum Gate* that quoting from the Bible may be a form of provocation and that to deal seriously with religion and politics disturbs social niceties. However, the pleasurable aspect of Muriel Spark's writing should not be played down. She supposedly told Allan Massie, 'I'm not so moralistic that I've worked out a moral system. Art wins for the artist over religion every time'[2]. This implies that her concern with narrative plotting outweighs her concern with God's plots; certainly she has been willing to use literary genres not conventionally associated with seriousness of purpose. But the apparent incongruity of her narrative forms assists her seriousness by undermining preconceived ideas. Her repudiation of the idea of having a 'system' is consistent with the avoidance in her novels of allegiance to any kind of dogma; they explore rather than repeat their religious intertexts.

One of the biblical texts that Muriel Spark has returned to again and again in her writing is *The Book of Job*. In 1955 she published an article, 'The mystery of Job's

Suffering' in the *Church of England Newspaper*, the title of her first novel, *The Comforters*, is an obvious reference to *Job*, *Not To Disturb* includes two quotations from it, the second of which is explicitly attributed:

> "...somewhat like the war horse," says Lister, "in the Book of Job: He saith among the trumpets Ha! Ha! and he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains and the shouting..." (p.92)

and finally, in 1984 she published *The Only Problem*, a novel centrally engaged with *The Book of Job*. Derek Stanford in his biographical and critical study, *Muriel Spark*, tells us: 'The title of *The Comforters* refers to the story of Job, about whose plight and predicament Muriel had once started to write a book'[3]. *The Only Problem* can thus be seen as the culmination of a sustained process of engagement with a particular text and with its peculiar difficulties for a Christian interpreter. It is a novel that is explicitly about reading and analysing another text. It can also be seen as the final realization of the project of writing a book about the 'plight and predicament' of Job referred to by Derek Stanford. There was therefore no doubt about its selection as one of the texts to be given extended consideration in this chapter.

Other decisions were not so straightforward given the permeating concern with the Bible and religious doctrines in Muriel Spark's writing. However, the range and complexity of *The Mandelbaum Gate*'s treatment of religious texts invited detailed consideration. The attention given in the novel to the constructedness and interrelatedness of concepts of religion, nationality, class and individual identity, and to the associated conceptions of loyalty, patriotism and private conscience, allows it to deal with John Frow's 'relations of force'[4] in an interesting way. Its comprehensiveness means that in giving a reading of *The Mandelbaum Gate* it is possible to benefit from

critical insights offered in relation to some of the other novels where religion is a major concern. Of all Muriel Spark's novels perhaps *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* has received most critical attention. There have been some particularly illuminating accounts of its critique of Scottish Calvinism, notably by David Lodge[5], Isabel Murray and Bob Tait[6], and Glenda Norquay[7]. Their work has informed my discussion of the treatment of non-conformism in *The Mandelbaum Gate*. By making these selections, I hope to avoid duplication both within my text and of work already accomplished by others. Although *The Only Problem* is the later novel, I will discuss it first because of the intensity of its engagement with one Old Testament story. I will then go on to consider *The Mandelbaum Gate* and its references to a wide range of religious intertexts.

2.2 *THE ONLY PROBLEM*

In *The Only Problem* when Harvey sits in the museum at Epinal three texts are explicitly brought together: his story, George de la Tour's painting *Job visité par sa femme* and the Old Testament *Book of Job*. Parallels are made manifest between Harvey and Job and between Effie and Job's wife. The reader is also drawn into the system of paralleling mechanisms by the analogy between Harvey's depiction as interpreter of the other texts and the reader's own engagement in the process of interpretation. The sustained meditation on the painting is given prominence by its position in the narrative, constituting a calm centre of solitary reflection within a text dominated by dialogue and action. The question of interpretation, as noted by Norman Page in *Muriel Spark*[1], is highlighted in the following passage:

> To Harvey's mind there was much more in the painting to illuminate the subject of Job than in many of the lengthy commentaries that he knew so well. It was eloquent of a new idea, and yet, where had the painter found justification for his treatment of the subject? (p.76)

This is a self-referential device which invites the reader to pose the final question in the context of the novel. A further comparison is invited by:

> The scene here seemed to Harvey so altogether different from that suggested by the text of *Job*, and yet so deliberately and intelligently contemplated that it was impossible not to wonder what the artist actually meant. (p.77)

The inference is that in the novel, too, the text of *Job* has been 'deliberately and intelligently contemplated' and it is worth making an effort to ponder what, if

anything, in the original could justify the interpretation offered.

The question of interpretation is given a humorous inflection later in the novel. A conversation between Harvey and a policeman contains an apparently frivolous account of the *Book of Job*:

> "Job was an affluent man. He sat among the ashes. Some say, on a dung-heap outside the city. He was very conventional. So much so that God was bored with him."
>
> "Is that in the scriptures?" said the policeman.
>
> "No, it's in my mind."
>
> "You've actually written it down. They took photocopies of some of your pages." (p.149)

The distinction made between an idea being in the text or in the reader's mind touches on the issue of where meaning resides. In his treatment of this subject Umberto Eco draws on the distinction between the *intentio operis* and the *intentio lectoris*; he produces a circular model of the interaction of the two:

> Since the intention of the text is basically to produce a model reader able to make conjectures about it, the initiative of the model reader consists in figuring out a model author that is not the empirical one and that, in the end, coincides with the intention of the text.[2]

There is no objective method of checking the validity of the interpretation reached through this process, but that does not remove the conviction that some interpretations are more reasonable than others. Eco invokes the 'old' idea that, 'any interpretation given of a certain portion of text can be accepted if it is confirmed by, and must be rejected if it is challenged by, another portion of the same text'[3]. In reading *The Only Problem* we are necessarily engaged in a consideration of the coherence of its interpretation of the biblical story as well as of

the de la Tour painting. We are also seeking to establish the intention of the text we are actually reading, and consequently our activity reflects Harvey's engagement with interpretation.

Muriel Spark was first provoked into publishing her ideas on the *Book of Job*[4] by her opposition to the interpretation offered by C. G. Jung in *Answer to Job*[5]. While Jung's study and her article are not "obligatory" intertexts to *The Only Problem*, knowledge of their arguments focuses attention on certain features of the novel and helps to show what is at stake. In her article Muriel Spark asserts the necessity of attending carefully to the epilogue:

> ...in the epilogue we find the only rational words which God is represented to speak in his answer to Job; that is where Job is instructed to pray for his friends and they to offer sacrifices for themselves. (This is, in fact, the only intelligible answer to the problem of suffering, from a literal reading, which the Book of Job has to offer; the importance of retaining the epilogue should be evident from this fact alone.)[6]

But the reason that there is a problem is that the text is enigmatic and puzzling. Northrop Frye considers this to be one of its most important features:

> To answer a question ... is to accept the assumptions in it and thereby to neutralize the question by consolidating the mental level on which the question was asked. ... a God who was glibly ready to explain it all would be more contemptible than the most reactionary of divine bullies.[7]

Enigma is thus defended as an admirable constitutive feature of a deity. Muriel Spark advocates acceptance of the need to conceive of God as operating on a different mental level from humans:

> At the point where human reason cannot reconcile the fact of evil with the goodness of God, an anthropomorphic conception of God breaks down. Is this not the main point of the Book of Job?[8]

However, the fact that she wrote this in 1955 should not be used to explain the text of a novel published in 1984. In order to understand what the novel is saying it is necessary to consider its formal structure as well as its rhetorical strategies.

The Only Problem is not only a commentary on the *Book of Job*, it is a commentary couched in the same kind of form, that is narrative fiction. Its analogies operate at the level of plot and also of structure. The parallel structuring is most marked by the division of the narrative into three parts. In her review of the *Answer to Job* Muriel Spark places great emphasis on the tripartite division of the Job story. One of her major objections to Jung's interpretation is that he totally ignores what she calls the epilogue. Indeed, his account not only fails to mention verses 7-17 of chapter 42, it implicitly contradicts what is contained in them. She argues that a newer story - the verse dialogue - is contained within an older prose fable. Part one of *The Only Problem*, like the prologue to *Job*, gives an account of the events which lead to the situation of the hero as a "sufferer"; part two of both explores and debates the heroes' conditions, largely through dialogue; and part three constitutes the epilogue. Omniscient, detached, past-tense narration is the mode in both cases, with no authorial comment to guide interpretation. The formal attributes of the biblical text, which are clearly of importance to the writer of fiction, are not given prominence by Jung.

Some of the differences between their interpretations emerge in the novel but not in Muriel Spark's article, perhaps reflecting her continuing engagement with the *Job* story in the interim. There is a crucial difference between the conceptions of God which each writer articulates. A telephone conversation between Harvey and his Auntie Pet invokes a key distinction:

> "I saw you on the television and it's all in the paper. How could you blaspheme in that terrible way, saying those things about your Creator?"
>
> "Auntie Pet, you've got to understand that I said nothing whatsoever about God, I mean our Creator. What I was talking about was a fictional character in the *Book of Job*, called God...." (p.135)

The distinction made here is absent from Jung's account, for although he writes, 'If, for instance, we say "God," we give expression to an image or verbal concept which has undergone many changes in the course of time'[9], his commentary on the Biblical texts makes no acknowledgement of the division between image and reality, but treats "God" as a patient on the psychiatrist's couch. This is evident in the following extracts:

> There is reason to suspect that he [Yahweh] is about to loosen his matrimonial ties with Israel but hides this intention from himself.[10]

> Yahweh's intention to become man, which resulted from his collision with Job, is fulfilled in Christ's life and suffering.[11]

> Without Yahweh's knowledge and contrary to his intentions, the tormented though guiltless Job had secretly been lifted up to a superior knowledge of God which God himself did not possess...Job, by his insistence on bringing his case before God, even without hope of a hearing, had stood his ground and

thus created the very obstacle that forced God to reveal his true nature.[12]

These statements are peculiarly disorientating because of their confidence about Yahweh's intentions and about his unconscious. But most bizarre is the absence of any recognition of the text as a fiction which articulates human dilemmas in relation to the concept of divinity[13]. The novel's insistence that the God of *Job* is a character in a story can thus be seen as supplementing Muriel Spark's original "answer to Jung".

Immediately before the beginning of part three the novel foregrounds the concept of enigma. A letter from Harvey to Edward includes:

> I'm analysing the God of *Job*, as I say. We are back to the Inscrutable. If the answers are valid then it is the questions that are all cock-eyed.
>
> *Job* 38, 2-3: Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?
>
> Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.
>
> It is God who asks the questions in Job's book. (p.180)

So the reader is made to consider who asks the questions in this book and who, if anyone, answers them. Up to this point Harvey has been asking questions about the *Book of Job*, but if the narrator is analogous to God we would expect the questioning to be reversed at the end. There is also an invitation to the reader to consider if the right questions have been posed. The novel closes with a question and an answer, but on a literal level the answer is cock-eyed, which leaves the reader challenged to reflect on the question - or the intertextual context - which could make sense of it:

> "I quite agree," says Edward. "What will you do now that you've finished *Job*?"

"Live another hundred and forty years. I'll have three daughters, Clara, Jemima and Eye-Paint." (p.189)

The explicit reference to *Job* points up the absurdity of its ending on a literal level. In highlighting enigma the novel parallels its intertext, and ultimately in both cases the texts themselves pose the questions and the readers, if anybody, find answers.

Part three of the novel begins with a quotation: 'So the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning' (p.185). Placed where it is, this raises all sorts of questions about what constitutes a blessing, whether Harvey can be described as more blessed at the end of the novel than at the beginning, and about readers' expectations of happy endings. The text ensures that the possibility of irony is not overlooked: 'And Harvey wondered again if in real life Job would be satisfied with this plump reward, and doubted it. His tragedy was that of the happy ending' (p.186). Previously the possible banality of life without suffering has been probed through Harvey's encounter with a pathetic figure in the police station:

> Patience, pallor and deep anxiety: there goes suffering, Harvey reflected. And I found him interesting. Is it only by recognising how flat would be the world without the sufferings of others that we know how desperately becalmed our own lives would be without suffering? Do I suffer on Effie's account? Yes, and perhaps I can live by that experience. We all need something to suffer about. (p.153)

The domestic scene at the end could therefore be read as 'desperately becalmed'. Like Job, Harvey is blessed with the promise of fruitfulness. The intensity of his engagement with suffering is apparently over, but Effie is dead and his monograph on *Job* is finished. Is this the 'tragedy' of the 'happy ending'?

Bernard Harrison proposes an alternative reading of the end of the novel. According to him Harvey has acquired understanding of humanity and a readiness to feel love for his new "family":

> ...Harvey's admission to himself of his love for Effie necessarily brings him into a state in which he feels for the first time the force of the two things God is undoubtedly saying to Job in Job 38-41. The first of these is that the very things which make for suffering in the world, wild beasts, for instance, or human beings, are proper objects of delight and love, as well as of terror and moral loathing.[14]

There is support for Harrison's optimistic reading of the ending in the references to fertility and colour which open the final chapter. Throughout the rest of the novel grey tones predominate; the weather, when described, is overcast or wet and when spring flowers appear in the château Harvey destroys them in his paranoid search for a bugging device. In the last chapter the fertility extends to vegetation - 'the cherry trees are in flower' (p.188) - and humans - 'Ruth is there, already showing her pregnancy' (p.188). Auntie Pet is surrounded by a riot of clashing colours:

> Auntie Pet, wrapped in orange and mauve woollens, sits upright on the edge of the sofa, which forms a background of bright yellow and green English fabrics for her. (p.188)

This sudden eruption of brilliance, however, is such a cliché that it could be seen to reinforce ironically the shallowness of domestic comfort.

A cyclic pattern is constructed by beginning the first and last chapters with Edward driving along the same road. This repetition marks a movement towards closure, corresponding more to the pattern of return manifested in the New Testament than to the continuous movement through

history of the Old. Gabriel Josipovici in *The Book of God*[15] makes this distinction between the two parts of the Christian Bible. He argues that the Hebrew Bible, in which the books are ordered differently from the Old Testament, emphasizes endless processes of triumph and defeat, remembering and forgetting, whereas the New Testament allows the consolation of fulfilled desires, of an end which makes retrospective sense of the whole. Through his study of the two Bibles he brings out the relation between forms of narration and theology:

> For a book reinforces the sense of unity, of an end already implicit in the beginning, which was precisely the view the Christian scriptures desired to promote - understandably enough, since for the Christians unity had been given to history, and therefore to the book which enshrined that history, by the person of Jesus himself. And what this suggests is that, among the implicit and explicit arguments about the nature of God and of history in which Jews and Christians have engaged, there is bound up an argument about the nature of books and of this book in particular.[16]

It may be that the Bible has powerfully influenced narrative expectation in relation to novels and that Bernard Harrison's interpretation of the ending of *The Only Problem* as manifesting the consolations of love and enlightenment derives from long established patterns of readerly expectation encouraged, albeit not initiated by, the Christian Bible.

The significance of endings has become a commonplace of critical theory since Frank Kermode published *The Sense of an Ending* in 1968[17]. Wallace Martin, in giving an account of work in this field, explains the concept of narrative "retrodiction" as follows:

> It is the end of the temporal series - how things eventually turned out - that determines which event

began it: we know it was a beginning because of the end. If a chance meeting or well-conceived plan comes to nothing, it was not a beginning, in fiction or fact. Thus history, fiction and biography are based on a reversal of cause-effect relations. Knowing an effect, we go back in time to find its causes; the effect "causes" us to find "causes" (which are "effects" of our search).[18]

The same idea is presented more humorously in *The only Problem* through a dialogue between Auntie Pet and Harvey:

> "You shouldn't question the Bible. Job was a good man. There is a Christian message in the *Book of Job*."
>
> "But Job didn't know that."
>
> "How do you know? We have a lovely Bible, there. Why do you want to change it? You should look after your wife and have a family, and be a good husband, with all your advantages, and the business doing so well. Your Uncle Joe refused the merger." (p.136)

Auntie Pet is, like certain other Muriel Spark characters, naive, apparently inconsequential in thought, and yet says things that are either profoundly wise or profoundly silly. In this exchange she represents the lesson of the New Testament with its retrospective reading of the *Book of Job*. Harvey, on the other hand, speaks for the Old Testament. Both schemes of thinking are allowed for in the novel and the ending can be read as a message of Christian consolation or as the 'tragedy' of the 'happy ending'. Its ambiguity encourages readers to recognize the different kinds of narrative expectations they bring to the text and how these have been constructed through the stories which have been dominant in their experience. The ambiguous ending leaves the two possible readings in a state of tension, declining to reconcile or choose between the narrative forms of the two Testaments. However, ambiguity in itself

constitutes another parallel with the enigmatic Old Testament story.

The last words of novels by Muriel Spark are evidently chosen with fastidious care. In *The Only Problem* the reference to three daughters consolidates the patterning of threes which is common to both texts - the division into three parts, the three comforters or interrogators ('Harvey's interrogators had been three' (p.91)), the three years Harvey takes to complete his essay on *Job* (p.185), and the daughters: Kezia/Clara, Jemima and Kerenhappuch/Eye-Paint. The name 'Eye-Paint' is given prominence by its apparent absurdity as well as by its position at the very end of the novel, thereby prompting thought about its significance. For one of Job's daughters to have a name meaning 'box of eye-paint' seems incongruous and frivolous. It can also be taken to sanction pleasure derived from beauty and ornamentation, the delight in all aspects of creation. The emphasis on Effie's beauty and its power to move others is brought into focus by such a reading. The link between Effie and Job's wife as represented by Georges de la Tour is that both are created as objects to contemplate with aesthetic pleasure and love. The stress on the visual, and literally on 'paint', is further strengthened in the novel by two other references to paintings:

> There was a kitchen visible beyond the room, with a loaf of bread and a coffee mug visible on the table. It looked like a nineteenth century narrative painting. (p.13)

> Both sisters were fair with the fair lashed look and faint eyelashes of some Dutch portraits. (p.45)

The references reinforce the concept of visual pleasure and the suggestion that this is the significance of Job's oddly named daughter.

Muriel Spark's 1955 commentary on the *Book of Job* ends, like the novel, with the daughters:

> If we read only the prologue and the dialogue, the effect is extremely ironical; add the epilogue and we are given that kind of anagogical humour which transcends irony, and which is infinitely mysterious. Read aright, the epilogue is not merely a conventional happy ending; it represents something beyond the reach of discourse which Job, for all he was an upright man, really had to come to terms with in order to gain his peace; some wisdom which combines heavenly ideas with earthly things not the least of which, perhaps, are symbolised by Eye-paint and her sisters.[19]

The interpretation offered in *The Only Problem* is consistent with this explanation. Its use of the name Eye-Paint can also be seen as an aspect of the bringing together in the novel of 'heavenly ideas with earthly things', or spirit with matter, as well as combining the comic with the serious. The repudiation of Cartesian separation is another of the threads which run through Muriel Spark's oeuvre. Again she stated her theoretical position in an early essay, 'The Religion of an Agnostic', published in 1953:

> It could be abundantly demonstrated that present day Christian creative writing, that which is most involved in an attempt to combat materialism, reflects a materialism of its own; this takes the form of a dualistic attitude towards matter and spirit. They are seen too much in a moral conflict, where spirit triumphs by virtue of disembodiment. This is really an amoral conception of spirit.[20]

She goes on to claim that it is in the writing produced by such an unlikely person as Proust that the desired wholeness can be found. This is not only because his writing 'escapes the tendency to equate matter with evil' but because of its rescuing of the eternal from the

transient. She draws an analogy between Christian 'sacramental understanding of eternity by faith' and Proust's, 'method of apprehending eternity through our senses'; in both cases action in the world, whether it be the act of taking the sacrament or of sensory experience, is emphasized. She concludes that, 'An involuntary act of remembrance, to Proust, is a suggestive shadow of what a voluntary act of remembrance is to a Christian'. Her writing stresses that nothing, especially humour, should be excluded from a conception of God's creation, neither from the world nor from the sacred text.

An increasing emphasis on the idea that the morality of the spirit is at odds with the corruption of the body can be traced through the New Testament teaching and the development of Puritanism. While doctrinal differences are not discussed explicitly in *The Only Problem*, they are addressed indirectly through the network of texts which meet there. The choice of settings is one of the indirect ways in which doctrinal differences are invoked. This is the only novel by Muriel Spark to be set in France and, to an English reader, this has connotations of Catholicism. The contrast between the use made of Italy, also a Catholic country, and France brings out further resonances; Italy is linked with terrorism, the Mafia, with drama and action whereas France is cerebral and intellectual, a fit place in which to study and write[21]. During the novel the clash of cultural stereotypes becomes evident when "Italy" and its terrorism erupt into the tranquillity of Epinal. Lorraine is a region of France relatively unfrequented by tourists and therefore well suited to the idea of retreat from society[22]. The image of retreat is reinforced by making Harvey an outsider, a Canadian, a nationality associated by the English mind with prosperity but, in contrast to American, not with political power and cultural

imperialism. The cottage where he lives and works draws on texts of the rural hermitage, of self-imposed scholarly asceticism; it has connotations of the gentleman amateur which hark back to an age of leisured affluence for the few.

Aristocratic values are also represented by the château and its owners, but in this case they belong to the impecunious European aristocracy. The Place Stanislaus in Nancy, with its 'splendid gilt gates' (p.56), provides a suitable setting for the meeting between Harvey and the owners of the château, evoking the past glories of France. The textual associations of pastness, Catholicism and aristocratic manners are contrasted with Protestantism and bourgeois values. At the point in the story where Harvey is first shown as missing Effie she is described through his thoughts as, 'anarchistic, aristocratic' (p.61); this contrasts with the description of Ruth as 'thoroughly bourgeois' (p.61). In constructing the distinction between them another house is made to serve as a "text" - the country rectory in which they grew up, an epitome of Anglicanism. Ruth is described as remembering the rectory with affection, particularly the 'sound of the woodpecker in the tree outside her window' (p.44), and Harvey tells the police, 'She wanted the château because of a tree outside the house with a certain bird - how do you say "woodpecker"?' (p.160). The bourgeois values which Ruth imposes on the château are linked through this repeated image with her protestant, curate's wife affiliations. Effie is totally unable to 'recall any sound effects' (p.44) of the rectory, which marks her separation from the Anglicanism it symbolizes. The depiction of Edward and Ruth's capacity for self-deceit implies that the protestant emphasis on individual conscience, on faith rather than works, can be a source of hypocrisy. However, a reading which suggested that

Effie is made to represent higher values than Ruth would imply that the novel endorses terrorism, which is not the case. Rather, it indicates that while anarchism and aristocratic "style" may be glamorous, glamour is dangerous as well as attractive. The resistance to easy identification with one set of values is consistent with the ambiguity of the ending, reinforcing both negative and positive readings of the domesticity provided by Ruth.

An emphasis on individual conscience has informed the development of the novel and has led to patterns of readerly expectation. A novel that emphasizes action rather than motivation can thus disconcert such expectation, but it is appropriate that engagement with an Old Testament story should reflect that Testament's concern with action and obedience rather than motivation and faith. Muriel Spark's characters have frequently confused, or even repelled, readers because of their lack of inwardness; what she leaves out they are tempted to supply. Thus Alan Bold says of Harvey, 'His insight into Job's predicament is an intellectual affectation'[23]; he goes on:

> Harvey eschews evil only because it has never visited him. Ruth genuinely comforts him, as does the baby....He is content, and even the news that Effie has been arrested for shoplifting in a Trieste supermarket simply confirms his view of her as a kleptomaniac he can well do without.[24]

There is nothing in the text to support his attributions of feeling to Harvey; his comments serve both to highlight what has been omitted and the fact that they appear to be omissions only because readers are accustomed to novels which emphasize individual consciousness. The sermon in *The Mandelbaum Gate* includes:

> It does not count what feelings are, if our feelings can be conditioned by the weather or the artistic tastes of the people around us. A good disposition is more precious to God than fine feelings. In Jerusalem, our Blessed Lord suffered, died, and rose again to life. It is enough that we are here. (p.197)

Readers accustomed to forms of narration which have derived from Protestant conceptions of salvation and an increasingly secularized focus on the individual may be baffled by novels which stress the externalities of behaviour, acts of presence rather than feelings.

The contrast between action and contemplation is invoked in *The Only Problem* through two other specifically mentioned intertexts, the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus and the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles. At one level they, like the references to 'Léveque who is the best modern scholar on *Job*' (p.132) and to the relative merits of various translations of the Bible, serve to establish the seriousness of Harvey's study (or by implication the author's). On a formal level there is an analogy between the treatment of violent action in the novel and in Greek tragedy; in both cases violence takes place "off-stage". Hence the novel deals with the meaning of action, not its depiction. Part of the "problem" represented through Harvey is the dilemma of the artist who surveys but does not participate in events. This is made explicit:

> How can you deal with the problem of suffering if everybody conspires to estrange you from suffering? He felt like the rich man in the parable: it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for him to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. (p.64)

Wealth is presented as both enabling and debilitating; it enables the pursuit of scholarship (and the writing of novels) but is a barrier to experiences which may be necessary to salvation. However, wealth can also be an

image of spiritual possessions; this is how Northrop Frye reads the ending of the *Book of Job*:

> Perhaps if we were to see Job in his restored state we should see, not beautiful daughters or 16,000 sheep, but only a man who has seen something that we have not seen, and knows something that we do not know.[25]

The ambiguous ending of *The Only Problem* creates uncertainty about the acquisition of wisdom as well as about the depiction of Harvey as a "sufferer". In one instance, however, the novel is unequivocal: Pomfret asks Harvey, 'But on a hypothesis, how would you feel if you knew she was a terrorist?' and the text continues, 'Harvey thought, I would feel I had failed her in action, which I have' (p.152). The baldness of his assertion carries conviction. It invites the reader to consider the depiction of his abandonment of his wife and withdrawal into scholarly isolation ~~not~~ as an image not of lack of feeling but of inadequate behaviour. Unlike the heroes of Greek tragedy, he is inactive and does not suffer in his own body.

It would be simplistic to think that the references to Greek tragedy merely serve to highlight the shortcomings of Harvey. As we have already seen, the novel challenges easy assumptions about the nature of suffering, and questions the traditional concepts of tragedy. In Greek tragedy the downfall of the protagonist is in some way merited; by contrast, it is the lack of justice in Job's punishment that makes his story such an affront to human understanding. The deep-seated need to see suffering as merited, not arbitrary, is represented by the "comforters" and denied by Job and Harvey: 'We do not get what we merit' (p.44) and 'Suffering isn't in proportion to what the sufferer deserves' (p.50) are both statements given to Harvey. Another facile assumption that both texts subvert is the value of friends in helping us cope

with adversity: '"One thing that the *Book of Job* teaches us," Harvey said, "is the futility of friendship in times of trouble..."' (p.150). Greek tragedy is invoked in support of this view; a letter from Harvey to Edward contains:

> As to your advice, do you remember how Prometheus says, 'It's easy for the one who keeps his foot on the outside of suffering to counsel and preach to the one who's inside'? (p.179)

and later it says:

> But 'no-one pities men who cling wilfully to their sufferings.' (*Philoctetes* - speech of Neoptolemus). I'm not even sure that I suffer, I only endure distress. But why should I analyse myself? I am analysing the God of *Job*. (p.180)

The novel indicates that the separation is not possible. The God of *Job* cannot be analysed without considering the nature of suffering, and the impatience of Job's comforters is shared by Harvey's friends. The explicit, and generously annotated, reference to *Philoctetes* strengthens the claim that impatience and incomprehension are the typical human responses of those who witness suffering, particularly when it seems to them in excess of any apparent cause. They are represented by the butterfly in the lines from Kipling quoted in the novel:

> The toad beneath the harrow knows
> Exactly where each tooth-point goes;
> The butterfly upon the road
> Preaches contentment to that toad. (p.68)

Mental suffering is more likely than physical to be greeted with incomprehension, but the novel implies that it is nevertheless serious. Harvey's statement, '...Job has a sort of nervous breakdown' (p.68) uses anachronism playfully while at the same time encouraging reflection about the mental component of all suffering.

Kierkegaard's observations on *The Book of Job* emphasize the cruelty which results from thinking that suffering must be deserved:

> The significance of this book really lies in showing the cruelty we men commit when we look upon unhappiness as a guilt, a crime. For it is human selfishness which desires to escape from the impression, the solemn and moving impression of suffering, of what can happen to a man in life - in order to protect oneself against it one explains suffering as guilt: it is his own fault. Oh cruelty of man![26]

He also stresses Job's desire for acceptance of his innocence:

> What concerns Job is to be in the right, in a certain sense even against God, but above all against his friends who instead of consoling him martyr him with the proposition that he suffers guiltily.[27]

The impact of Kierkegaard's *Journals* on Muriel Spark's ideas is reflected by references to his work in her novels and stories. In 'Bang-bang You're Dead' she writes:

> Sybil lay in bed in the mornings reading the translation of Kierkegaard's *Journals*, newly arrived from England in their first, revelatory month of publication. She felt like a desert which had not realized its own aridity till the rain began to fall upon it.[28]

While *The Only Problem* separates suffering from desert, it is not concerned to assert the innocence of the hero. In this respect Jung's insistence on the importance of Job standing his ground and 'bringing his case before God' is closer to Kierkegaard's interpretation than is Muriel Spark's text. The novel implies that a desire for justice depends on a limited human understanding and is linked to the wish to see suffering as merited.

The word 'justice' is repeated several times in the explanations Ruth gives to herself and others of her decision to take Clara to Harvey. The repetition is a rhetorical strategy that focuses attention on what is actually meant by the word. It also highlights a gap between Ruth's expressed motives and a more plausible, self-interested explanation. The repetitions culminate in:

> "A matter of justice. A balancing of accounts." This was how Ruth put it to Harvey. "I'm passionate about justice," she said.
>
> "People who want justice," Harvey said, "generally want so little when it comes to the actuality. There is more to be had from the world than a balancing of accounts."
>
> She supposed he was thinking of his character Job, as in fact he was. (p.42)

Bernard Harrison argues that the real problem posed by the *Book of Job* is its lack of justice:

> What the poem is grappling with is not the possibility that God does not care about suffering, construed as always and intrinsically an evil, but that he does not care about our deserts.[29]

While the novel acknowledges the existence of this as a problem, it undermines the demand for 'justice' by its use of rhetoric; the pettiness of the demand is emphasized by the trivializing exaggeration of 'I'm passionate about justice' and by its equation with 'a balancing of accounts'. Muriel Spark's essay on *Job* similarly belittles human understanding with its insistence on logic at the expense of mystery.

For Jung, the central problem of *Job* is God's omniscience, coupled with his willingness to be 'influenced by one of his sons'[30]. He can account for the

story only by interpreting God as divided and possessing an unconscious as well as a conscious aspect:

> But Yahweh is not a human being: he is both a persecutor and a helper in one, and the one aspect is as real as the other. Yahweh is not split but is an *antimony* - a total of inner opposites - and this is the indispensable condition for his tremendous dynamism, his omniscience and omnipotence.[31]

One possible answer to Jung's concern that God is too easily influenced is provided through Harvey:

> The supernatural, with power to act so strongly and disastrously, could only, in Job's mind, be God. And we know he was right in the context of the book, because in the Prologue you read specifically that it was God who brought up the subject of Job to Satan; it was God, in fact, who tempted Satan to torment Job, not Satan who tempted God. (p.110)

An enduring concern with omniscience and omnipotence is evident in Muriel Spark's fiction. She probes the issues raised by using narrative techniques which explore analogies between God and the author. Authorial control is most notably challenged in *The Comforters* and *The Driver's Seat*, and *Not To Disturb* examines the concept of predestination. In *The Only Problem*, however, the narrative voice is less troubled; omniscience is assumed, and the convention of past-tense, third-person narration is adopted. In this way the narrative technique reinforces the apparent acceptance of all features of God's creation, and of the inaccessibility of God's purposes to human reason. In her discussion of metafiction Linda Hutcheon says:

> In today's metafiction, the artist reappears, not as God-like Romantic creator, but as the inscribed maker of a social product that has the potential to participate in social change through its readers. ...The best way to demystify power, metafiction

> suggests, is to reveal it in all its arbitrariness....[32]

While some of Muriel Spark's earlier novels 'inscribe their maker' in the text, *The Only Problem* could be described as moving in the opposite direction and re-mystifying power by not acknowledging the author in the text. Harvey says to the press:

> ...Job's problem ... was partly a lack of knowledge. Everybody talked but nobody told him anything about the reason for his sufferings. Not even God when he appeared. Our limitations of knowledge make us puzzle over the cause of suffering, maybe it is the cause of suffering itself. (p.111)

If suffering is indeed caused by inability to understand, is acceptance of mystery the only solution?

Gabriel Josipovici's account of *Job* accepts the centrality of mystery, but also offers a heartening conclusion. It is one that he sees as consistent with the text of *The Only Problem*, a novel which he praises for its understanding of the Old Testament. He writes:

> We are simply asked to recognize the mysterious connections between cause and effect, to recognize how little *we* can understand them. This does not mean that all is random. There seems to be a pattern, but what the pattern is will always escape us.
>
> There is in fact one whole biblical book written as an explanation of just this problem: Job. For the issue in Job is not only the meaning of suffering but also the meaning of meaning. Job says there is no meaning any more, while the comforters insist that there is and that they know what it is. At the climax of the book God speaks and asserts (a) that of course there is meaning, and (b) that it cannot be known by man but must be *accepted*.[33]

But if this is asserted in both *Job* and the novel, the difficulty of acting in accordance with such an insight is admitted. Harvey says of Job, 'he not only argued the problem of suffering, he suffered the problem of argument. And that is incurable' (p.30). The human necessity to try and make sense of experience cannot be stilled.

The distinction between mental and physical forms of suffering is already evident in the Old Testament story. It informs a key difference between Harvey and Job, which is made explicit in: 'He was covered in boils, for one thing, which I am not' (p.109). When the text says, 'To study, to think, is to live and suffer painfully' (p.153) there is no signal that we are to read this ironically. The conventional view, represented in the text by Stewart Cowper, is that it is lacking in humanity to be more absorbed by the *Book of Job* than by one's wife's whereabouts and actions, and that scholarly activity is a means of escaping from the pain of involvement with "real life". The clash of values is most evident, and most comic, in the press conference, where dialogue fails. This can be read as a criticism of the scholar whose inability to communicate is a result of solipsist denial of the procedures and concerns of others, but the journalists do not emerge unscathed; there is implicit criticism of their ignorance and of their inability to engage with moral or spiritual issues. The text repeatedly represents suffering as a consequence of living in any but the most superficial way - '"Oh, development involves suffering," Harvey had said' (p.27). But the text also warns against the 'spectacular neglect of material things' (p.13) that can be the concomitant of privileging mental activity over material existence, leading to failure in action. Here, again, there are no easy answers or one-sided conclusions.

There is an interesting parallel between Harvey's acceptance of suffering and Iris Murdoch's account of 'the mystical hero'. In an essay, 'Existentialists and Mystics', she made the following distinction:

> Whereas the existentialist hero is an anxious man trying to impose or assert or find himself, the mystical hero is an anxious man trying to discipline or purge or diminish himself. The chief temptation of the former is egoism, of the latter masochism.[34]

The essay advocates a morality based not on religion but on politics. While this marks a metaphysical difference between Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark, the concept that Harvey fails in action both acknowledges and resists the masochistic temptation. Iris Murdoch's argument that it is important to start with tangible needs and let abstractions follow may be compared with Muriel Spark's concern not to separate spirit and matter.

The destabilizing of received ideas accomplished in *The Only Problem* is assisted by its ambiguity. Bernard Harrison argues that the major importance of the fictional narrative mode is its capacity to provoke readers by challenging received opinion:

> Its [literature's] mission is not to impart Great Truths but to unhinge and destabilize them. What it has to say is never "this is how it is", but always, rather, "might it not be otherwise than an unwise and hasty epistemic confidence leads you to think? Might it not be ... like *this*?"[35]

This is similar to a claim made by Muriel Spark in one of her *Poetry Review* editorials, written in uncharacteristically[36] florid prose:

> Much of the greatest of poetry, music and art give us no pleasure, no peace, no happiness; rather do they storm and besiege us, breaking us asunder, until we, bewildered creatures, recognize their inhuman and

> infallible attributes identifying them with the adamantine pebble of divinity which persists in our deepest core.[37]

Even the title of *The Only Problem* is a provocation. Early in the novel the phrase is used with confidence, but each repetition casts more doubt on the nature of 'the problem', and on the existence of 'only one'. It is returned to its status as cliché in, 'The only problem with Nathan was how to explain what he saw in them' (P.35). But in this case, as so often when Muriel Spark uses clichés, its conventional usage begins to disintegrate, making the reader aware of the complexity that underlies even the most thoughtless of utterances. Here the 'problem' is an enigma, something puzzling which the mind worries about until it can find a satisfactory explanation. The *Book of Job* is also enigmatic, but its 'problem' has the force of an affront to human reason and morality. The novel confronts the standard objections to *Job*: that it depicts a cruel, boastful God - 'God as a character comes out badly, very badly' (p.30) - and one who, although supposedly good and merciful, allows or causes terrible suffering. Having presented this case, one which closely resembles Jung's argument, it proceeds to destabilize it and show how many 'problems' of interpretation there are. Harvey's conclusion, 'The *Book of Job* will never come clear. It doesn't matter; it's a poem' (p.132), underlines the textual barriers to interpretation. It indicates that it is probably futile to hope for a final clear meaning or the imparting of Great Truths; all that can be expected is the destabilizing of false simplicities.

By referring to 'The only problem with Nathan' the text invites consideration of this character's function; two intertextual references are of assistance here. He is

twice referred to as an angel; the first description adds to the pattern of references to the visual arts:

> His morning smile was delightful; he had a mouth like a Michelangelo angel and teeth so good, clear, strong and shapely it seemed to Edward, secretly, that they were the sexiest thing about him. (p.35)

The kind of angel he is becomes clear when he encourages Edward and Ruth to open Harvey's letter:

> But Nathan seemed to serve them like a gentleman who takes a high hand in matters of form, or an unselfconscious angel. In a way, that is what he was there for, if he had to be there. He often said things out of his inexperience and cheerful ignorance that they themselves wanted to say but did not dare. (p.36)

So this story too has its Satan. The mediated point of view is fraught with irony for it is Ruth and Edward who are ignorant and inexperienced, unable to recognize evil and cheerfully unaware of their self-deceptions. Nathan's 'morning smile' echoes *Isaiah*, 'Oh Lucifer, son of the morning!'[38] but the emphasis on his teeth is more puzzling. They suggest danger as well as sexual attraction, recalling the wolf in *Little Red Riding Hood*, who may appropriately be seen as another embodiment of Satan; he too is often depicted as a charming gentleman. The surname, Fox, reinforces this association and also links him with 'the gentleman with sandy whiskers'[39] in *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck*; the crucial point of identification is that they are all hypocritical seducers. Robert Hughes's description of grotesque Romanesque devils includes:

> Their orifices - mouth, nostrils, ears, anus - were extravagantly large. This in itself was a symbol of malevolence and aggression; the big mouth like the fairy-tale wolf's, 'all the better to eat you with'....[40]

He also refers to the link between Dionysus, Pan and Satan whereby the 'sensual grin of Pan'[41] becomes incorporated into Satanic iconography. The composite figure of Satan was built up over centuries, drawing on a range of cultural mythologies; the description of Nathan selects features which emphasize the glamorous aspect of evil. To a twentieth-century reader there is something comical in the excesses of mediaeval images of Hell and its demons; the evocation of a gentlemanly Satan, or fairy-tale wolf, therefore has a certain playfulness, but the hint of darker, more sinister evil is born out by Nathan's role as terrorist and seducer of Effie, bringer of suffering to Harvey.

What then are we to make of the quotation printed on his T-shirt, 'Poetry Is Emotion Recollected In Tranquillity' (p.35)? There is an obvious satiric reference to the trivializing use of "great sayings", taken out of context to be emblazoned on T-shirts; this can be construed as an attack on hippy culture and its facile appropriations. However, the implied association of Wordsworth with Satan, while it may seem harsh, demands consideration. Romanticism cultivated the glamorous aspects of evil, promoting images of beautiful fallen angels, or Byronic heroes. But this would be a more valid association with other Romantic writers than with Wordsworth. What is more pertinent to the Wordsworth quotation is the reference to withdrawal from action, explicitly condemned elsewhere. It may also be linked to the apparently frivolous debate about Job's 'high temperature':

> "...I think he had a high temperature all through the argument," Harvey said. "Because it's high poetry. Or else, maybe you're right; maybe it was the author who had the temperature. ..." (p.49)

It seems to be saying that the writing of poetry should not be calmly disengaged but should be filled with

passion. To many readers who find the surface of Muriel Spark's novels notable for their "coolness" this might come as a surprising idea.

The story-telling technique of *The Only Problem*, like the formal characteristics of Georges de la Tour's *Job Visited by his Wife*, is deceptively simple. In both cases the complexity of the analysis complements as well as comments on the biblical text. The reason that de la Tour's painting is puzzling is that the biblical text says little about Job's wife and what it does say has nothing of the tender intimacy of his representation. The novel quotes in full the relevant passage from *Job*:

> Harvey stared at the picture and recalled the verses that followed the account of Job's affliction with the boils:
>
> > And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes.
> >
> > Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die.
> >
> > But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips. (p.77-78)[42]

This is followed by speculation, mediated through representation of Harvey's thought-processes, on ways in which the words 'curse God, and die' could be seen as compatible with de la Tour's depiction of Job's wife. The analysis concludes with an assertion of the idiosyncrasy of the painter's vision: 'Of course, the painter was idealizing some notion of his own; in his dream, Job and his wife are deeply in love' (p.78). But then, by focusing on the use of the word 'we' in Job's reply, another idea is brought forward:

> That domestic 'we' is worth noticing, thought Harvey; he doesn't mean to abandon his wife, he has none of the hostility towards her that he has, later, for his friends. (p.78-79)

By drawing attention to Job's reply the novel indicates where the painter may have 'found justification for his treatment of the subject'[49].

The concept of 'being deeply in love' forms one of the complex strands linking *The Only Problem* to the de la Tour painting. Initially the relation between the two is as puzzling as the derivation of the painting from its biblical source. The novel contains no scenes of domestic harmony between Harvey and Effie; the nearest she comes to 'visiting' him in his Lorraine retreat is to engage in terrorist activities in the region, disrupting his seclusion. And yet parallels between Effie and Job's wife are asserted. The reference to 'Dutch portraits' in the description of Effie and Ruth is echoed in:

> The painting was made in the first part of the seventeeth century by Georges de La Tour, a native of Lorraine. It bears a resemblance to the Dutch candlelight pictures of the time. (p.76)

The novel makes a curious estimation of the ages of the couple in the painting: 'Both are in their early prime, a couple in their thirties' (p.77). The wrinkled skin on the torso and arms of the painted Job appears to indicate greater age. The discrepancy may be merely a difference of perception, but the text continues: 'Indeed their recently dead children were not yet married'. The abrupt transition from the painted image to the biblical text in order to marshall supporting evidence suggests an anxiety to consolidate parallels between the protagonists of both stories. The significance of these parallels emerges most clearly in the following passage:

In order to have a better look at Job's wife's face, Harvey put his head to one side. Right from the first he had been struck by her resemblance to Effie in profile. She was like Ruth, too, but more like Effie, especially about the upper part of her face. Oh, Effie, Effie, Effie. (p.79)

The exclamation is the first indication to the reader that Harvey is to be seen as still 'deeply in love' with his wife. The picture of married intimacy invoked through the descriptions of the painting therefore serves as an image of Harvey's loss.

The moral complexity of the novel is reinforced by the lack of sympathy in its depiction of Effie. It is evident that when her justification for stealing chocolate is given she is represented as speaking 'as one of the foolish women speaketh':

> Effie said, 'Why shouldn't we help ourselves? These multinationals and monopolies are capitalising on us, and two-thirds of the world is suffering.'
>
> She tore open the second slab, crammed more chocolate angrily into her mouth, and, with her mouth gluttonously full of stolen chocolate, went on raving about how two-thirds of the world was starving. (p.15)

The words 'tore', 'crammed', 'angrily', 'gluttonously' and 'raving' ensure that her argument cannot be taken as anything other than self-indulgent folly. In *Comedy and the Woman Writer* Judy Little, while discussing Muriel Spark's morality, refers to 'the humbling and mocking light of her severe vision'[44], and indeed the moral judgements in this novel are harsh. For although Effie's argument is allowed no credibility, Harvey's lack of response is also depicted as moral failure, and it is through comparison with Job that the significance of this failure is made explicit. Unlike Job, Harvey does not unite husband and wife in the pronoun 'we', insisting

instead on his moral separateness: 'His moral sense was always intensified where Effie was concerned' (p.19). Job's wife is not mentioned again at the end of the biblical story, but presumably she is the mother of his 'seven sons and three daughters'[45]; this may be read as the result of Job not abandoning or judging his wife, but answering her. In one sense Effie does finally 'visit' Harvey - as a corpse:

> *L'Institut Médico-Légal* in Paris. Her head was bound up, turban-wise, so that she looked more than ever like Job's wife. Her mouth was drawn slightly to the side.
>
> 'You recognise your wife, Effie Gotham?'
>
> 'Yes, but this isn't my wife. Where is she? Bring me my wife's body.' (p.186-187)

This is the culmination of the various images of Effie scattered through the text. The failure of the 'we' of marriage here seems to lead to the disintegration of any coherent sense in Harvey of the identity of the 'other'.

However, if Bernard Harrison is right, the ending of the novel is not as bleak as this suggests, if only because Harvey, like Job, can be seen to have gained in wisdom. There is an intriguing similarity between his interpretation of God's message to Job and a comment Muriel Spark made on John Masefield's poem, *Reynard the Fox*:

> ...although there is no "moral" to the narrative, the *moral vision* of the poet, which appears in all his stories is not lacking here. This moral vision may be described as a profound sense and love of uniqueness in all the visible world.[46]

Harrison sees God's message as 'love of uniqueness', too, through recognition that objects of 'terror and moral loathing' are also objects of 'delight and love'[47]. Like the God of *Job*, the author of the novel appears to

delight in all aspects of the created world; sinful characters, such as Effie and Nathan, are relished and made beautiful. She has frequently paid tribute to the narrative skills of John Masefield and in this novel she appears to share his 'moral vision'. The author of a novel may be compared with God, but this text asserts that God may become a poet:

> ...the author of *Job* turns God into a poet at that point, proclaiming wonderful hymns to his own creation, the buffalo, the ostrich, the wild ass, the horse, the eagle; then there's the sparrow-hawk. ...Finally come Behemoth and Leviathan. (p.131)

In the Old Testament God is manifest as a voice that engages in dialogue with his chosen people, whereas in the New Testament the presence of Christ in the flesh - God made visible - is paramount. It seems appropriate that a writer should be drawn to an Old Testament story and that churches should be filled with representations of the life of Christ. *The Only Problem*, by its evocation of the visual pleasure of painting as well as by its own allegiance to the word, celebrates both.

While the creator may delight in all that is made, it is not so easy for the created. The difficulty is given passionate expression in *The Comforters*:

> Caroline thought, 'The demands of the Christian religion are exorbitant, they are outrageous. Christians who don't realize that from the start are not faithful. They are dishonest; their teachers are talking in their sleep. "Love one another ... brethren, beloved ... your brother, neighbours, love, love, love" - do they know what they are saying?' (p.39)

Kierkegaard, too, has difficulty with this biblical injunction; his *Journals* contain:

> One must really have suffered very much in the world, and have been very unfortunate before there can even be any talk of beginning to love one's neighbour. It is only in dying to the joys and happiness of the world in self-denial that the "neighbour" comes into existence.[48]

The Old Testament God is angry and destructive, not just a benevolent father, and anger is often evident in Muriel Spark's writing, as it is in *The Comforters*. However, in *The Only Problem* there is a predominant sense of calm acceptance; within the narrative a balance is achieved between action and contemplation and, at the level of morality, there is recognition of human fallibility and of the inevitable coexistence of good and evil. It shares with both its major intertexts a delight in visual beauty, a combination of the domestic with the extreme and, ultimately, allegiance to enigma and mystery.

2.3 *THE MANDELBAUM GATE*

The biblical text quoted most frequently in *The Mandelbaum Gate* comes from the *Book of Revelations*:

> I know of thy doings, and find thee neither cold nor hot; cold or hot, I would thou wert one or the other. Being what thou art, lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, thou wilt make me vomit thee out of my mouth.[1] (p.21)

In a novel which raises many questions, what may be construed by being hot, cold or lukewarm is among the most puzzling. Commitment leading to political action might conventionally be thought "hot", but this assumption is challenged through the depiction of Eichmann. His uncritical obedience to the system of which he is a part is made comparable to the representation in other characters of uncritical loyalty to the places in which they happened to be born. In the typical British ex-patriates this is specifically allied to tepidness. Freddy is shown as breaking free from his "tepid" enslavement to decorum when he destroys his letters home. In this action repudiation of blood loyalty is equated with liberation from the tyranny of convention represented by his mother, 'a peculiar type of tyrant-liar' (p.60). The rival claims of loyalty to ties of birth and of commitment through individual conviction, which are marshalled in many different contexts throughout the novel, inflect its handling of a variety of religious texts and the politics which becomes embroiled with them.

The effectiveness of yoking together disparate texts is analysed by Wolfgang Iser in his study of reading processes. He distinguishes between a text's 'repertoire' and its 'strategies', describing the repertoire as 'all the familiar territory within the text' which:

> may be in the form of references to earlier works, or to social and historical norms, or to the whole culture from which the text has emerged - in brief, to what the Prague structuralists have called the "extratextual" reality.[2]

His strategies are intratextual procedures. When discussing the repertoire, he argues in favour of texts which forge new combinations:

> The social norms and literary allusions that constitute the two basic elements of the repertoire are drawn from two quite different systems: the first from historical thought systems and the second from past literary reactions to historical problems. The norms and schemata selected for the repertoire are rarely equivalent to one another - and in those few cases where they are, the text will cease to be informative because it will merely repeat the answers offered by an existing text, even though the historical problem will have changed.[3]

The schemata of *The Mandelbaum Gate* include use of several narrative genres - spy, adventure, romance, quest - and they are combined with 'historical thought systems' related to concepts of religion and politics not normally considered appropriate to the genres deployed. The heterogeneity is further increased by intertextual references to a range of material, such as the Bible and Dante's *Paradiso*, which is marked by its historical and generic separation from the novel's setting and schemata. In the ensuing discussion I shall therefore be considering the interaction of these various cultural and literary texts.

The character of Barbara Vaughan is constructed so as to make the political personal. She is introduced in terms of a problem of 'identity' which exists only if 'identity' is construed as an inheritance. This

construction is challenged when Barbara says to Saul Ephraim:

> But one doesn't altogether know what one is. There's always more to it than Jew, Gentile, half-Jew, half-Gentile. There's the human soul, the individual. Not "Jew, Gentile" as one might say "autumn, winter". Something unique and unrepeatable. (p.37)

But as the conversation continues a distinction is made between what can be chosen and what is an inevitable consequence of birth:

> He smiled as if he had heard it all before.
>
> "Then why did you choose the Gentile side in the end?"
>
> "I didn't choose any side at any time."
>
> "You became a Catholic.
>
> "Yes, but I didn't become a Gentile. It wouldn't be possible, entirely, seeing that I'm a half-Jew by natural birth."
>
> "Well, but look, Christianity's a Gentile religion. It's all the same to me, but it's a question of fact."
>
> Not essentially. After all, it started off as a new ordering of a Jewish religion."
>
> "Well, it's changed a lot since then."
>
> "Only accidentally. It's still a new order of an older firm." (p.37-38)

Inherited race is here distinguished from a chosen commitment to a particular creed. Even more important is the insistence that Barbara is no more divided than is Christianity. Like her, the Bible consists of two halves, the Jewish Old Testament and the Christian New Testament, and the link is made explicit early in the novel:

> She then remarked, without relevance, that the Scriptures were especially important to the half-Jew turned Catholic. The Old Testament and the New, she said, were to her - as near as she could apply to her

> own experience the phrase of Dante's vision - 'bound by love into one volume'. (p.26)

'Without relevance' can be seen as an authorial joke; the statement may not be relevant to the immediate context of the conversation but it is relevant to the larger design of the novel. While Christians may wish to deny their religion's 'older firm', the narrative shows that the pilgrim to the Holy Land is obliged to acknowledge Jewish history as well as Christian revelation; the priest who brings his flock to Mount Tabor, the supposed site of the Transfiguration, comments that it is also celebrated as the place 'where Deborah of the Old Testament collected an army against Sisera' (p.49).

In his study of the Bible, *The Book of God*, Gabriel Josipovici comments on the Old Testament's emphasis on communal belonging as opposed to the emphasis in the New Testament on individual belief. Because being a Jew was not an act of choice, the familial bond, with God as the father of Israel, was maintained however disobedient or sinful the children became. He argues that this made for a sense of continuing involvement in historical processes and that ritual acts of remembrance stress the importance in the present of what happened in the past: 'I am implicated because if they had not been saved then, I would not be hearing this story now'[4]. The importance that ritual remembrance and the Old Testament retain, even to non believers, is represented in the scene of the Passover supper in *The Mandelbaum Gate*. The novel also acknowledges a connection between the Jewish sense of history and modern politics through Muriel Spark's construction of Mendel Ephraim and his family:

> Many of the Ephraim family were unbelievers, and it would not have mattered if he had refused only the religion; but many non-religious Israelis were accustomed to speak in historical terms of Israel's

destiny; the Old Testament was to them a sacred book because it was the history of the Jews rather than a spiritual record; and it was quite common for those who did not accept any religious or divine element in life, to maintain that the Messianic prophecies had in fact been fulfilled in the establishment of the State of Israel. (p.105-106)

But it is not only the Jewish characters who confuse national identity, political commitment and religion; Freddy 'entertained a patriotic belief in God' (p.201). Once Christianity is an established state religion, such "tepid" allegiance to the faith becomes another manifestation of social decorum. So, while the Passover scene admits the comfort of familial belonging, the novel's celebration of escape from blood ties can be seen as a repudiation of political allegiance based solely on patriotic loyalty.

Gabriel Josipovici sees both gain and loss in the teaching of the New Testament with its acceptance of all who believe regardless of race. The move to 'ethical' or 'mystical' ties from ones that are 'familial' means that:

> the inner self becomes an object of scrutiny, and that the possibility of the co-existence of contrary emotions is ruled out: love *and* hate; pain *and* trust; jealousy. But contrary emotions are what we normally experience in our lives. The encounter with God thus becomes something separated from our normal lives, and that compartmentalization begins which so many Christian theologians lament today.[6]

Muriel Spark's concern about 'compartmentalization' was discussed in relation to *The Only Problem*; one form this takes in *The Mandelbaum Gate* is the insistence on the inseparability of Christianity from Judaism. Barbara may choose the New Testament belief but she refuses to repudiate her connection with the Old. She is constructed

as a character who subjects her 'inner self' to a great deal of 'scrutiny', but also as one who explores the co-existence of emotions and convictions. It is difficult to ignore the connection between the religious formation of the character and the writer, and indeed most commentators refer to Muriel Spark's Jewish father and Catholic conversion. However, within the novel it is the textual construction of character which is functional, enabling Barbara to serve as a means of provoking thoughts about the Bible and Christianity.

The concept of a pilgrimage is a way of exploring tensions and divisions within attitudes to history as well as faith. The plot motif raises questions about the relation of past to present, of what is known from written texts to what is experienced through physical presence. In her quest to visit only sites made sacred through biblical references, Barbara as a Christian pilgrim is initially made to resist the efforts of her guides to interest her in the modern state:

> Suddenly, as it seemed, from behind a few palm-trees Beersheba had appeared in a white dazzle of modern blocks reaching down to the great desert waves of the Negev. The desert lapped like a sea on the glittering strips of concrete that defined Beersheba's outlying blocks of flats.
>
> Barbara Vaughan said, "I'm really only interested in the Beersheba of Genesis."
>
> "This is the Beersheba of Genesis."
>
> ...
>
> "This is Beersheba, the birthplace of Jacob, the Father of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. We have a new school for immigrants. To teach them trades and Hebrew. I show you." (p.23-24)

The comic incongruity of past and present is reflected in the transitions of style as well as subject, but the

present is given its poetry too in the 'dazzle' and 'glitter' of modern buildings on the shores of the desert. It is made evident that to desire to see only 'the Beersheba of Genesis' is to confuse history with geography. In an essay on 'The *Blue Guide*' Roland Barthes argues that the Guide's emphasis on monuments reflects 'a partly superseded bourgeois mythology'[6] which he identifies as Christian. He says:

> To select only monuments suppresses at one stroke the reality of the land and that of its people, it accounts for nothing of the present, that is, nothing historical, and as a consequence, the monuments themselves become undecipherable, therefore senseless.[7]

The novel endorses the necessity of engaging with the present in order to understand the past but also emphasizes the persistence of the past in the present. A conversation between Barbara Vaughan and Saul Ephraim is again used as a means of encapsulating these key ideas:

> And once when he advised her, "Be tough with these official guides. Don't let them bully you. Tell them you only want to see places of antiquity. You can see modern housing estates and shopping centres anywhere in the world," - for some reason she then replied, "It's all antiquity in the long run." The archaeologist had then shrugged in his casual, Jewish way. "In the long run!" he said. "The modern flats won't last as long as Herod's water-pipes have lasted." (p.24-25)

The attitude of modern, secular tourists, seeking rediscovery of the past and aesthetic thrills, is also ridiculed through their 'offence' (p.91) at the sight of washing hung out to dry on the historic buildings of Acre. They, too, are depicted as confusing geography and history, being termed, 'the seekers of beautiful sights and spiritual sensations, who had come all the way from

the twentieth century, due west of Acre' (p.91). The conceptual separation of the east from the present is shown to be a form of romantic denial. In this way the compartmentalization commented on by Gabriel Josipovici is extended to tourists in general, not just to Christian pilgrims. The indication in this novel of the falsity of separating past from present, Old Testament from New, Jewish from Christian, secular from sacred is another manifestation of the concern not to separate spirit from matter which Muriel Spark expressed in her article on Proust.

But *The Mandelbaum Gate* distinguishes between recognition of connections and indiscriminate submerging of differences. A pilgrimage may be considered an attempt to bring together the 'Book of Scripture' and the 'Book of Nature'; however the sermon preached in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre asserts that they should not be confused. The treatment of the sermon is intriguing; the danger of its reading like a hectoring intrusion of the authorial voice is averted by focusing on its dismayed reception by the Franciscan brothers guarding the shrine and on its lack of impact on Barbara whose scarlet fever is beginning to take effect. Nevertheless, the length devoted to it obliges the reader to take it seriously, as does its lack of discernible irony. Ruth Whittaker observes:

> There is no narratorial affirmation of the sermon, but, when Mrs Spark is writing about what she considers to be eternal and important truths, her prose takes on a tone of sheer authority and authenticity which has no need of narratorial guidelines to make it convincing. So it is here.[8]

This is to locate authority in the text itself rather than in the encounter between text and reader. The stimulus to endow the sermon with significance is more

complicated than Ruth Whittaker's explanation allows. It could be argued that Lister in *Not To Disturb* is endowed with a similarly authoritative prose style, and yet the context signals to the reader that it would not be appropriate to accord his utterances the same weight as the sermon. Prose style may be indicative, but is not sufficient; context - the combination of events, voices and texts - must play its part. The consonance between what the preacher says and the rest of the novel provides a 'narratorial guideline' for the reader.

The distinction made in the sermon between archaeology and faith forms a link with the choice of profession for Harry Clegg. It indicates a difference as well as a similarity between the two endeavours - the archaeologist's and the pilgrim's - to understand the past through physical traces remaining in the land. Warning of the dubious authenticity of some of the sites of Christian pilgrimage, the Priest says:

> If you are looking for physical exactitude in Jerusalem it is a good quest, but it belongs to archaeology not faith. ...Jerusalem has been destroyed, rebuilt, fought over, conquered, and now is divided again. The historical evidence of our faith is scattered about under the ground; nothing is neat. And what would be the point of our professing faith if it were? There's no need for faith if everything is plain to the eye. We cannot know anything perfectly, because we ourselves are not perfect. (p.198-199)

This gives priority to the "word", to the 'Book of Scripture' which endows places with significance, and to faith rather than the 'neatness' of scientific 'evidence'. But the novel also claims the importance of uniting the word and matter through an 'act of presence' (p.283). The emphasis on action as a means of uniting the material and the spiritual is manifested through

Barbara's decision to marry whether or not Harry Clegg's previous marriage is dissolved. This reads as another endorsement of understanding which comes from faith rather than scholarly activity.

'Jerusalem' is invoked both as a text and through texts, as a physical place and as an intellectual construct. The preacher draws on several biblical references to Jerusalem: as the longed-for home of the Israelites in exile, as a place sacred to Christians, and as the prophesied eternal city. Here, too, Old and New Testaments are brought together and the spiritual is linked to the material:

> '..."We have an everlasting city," St Paul has said, "but not here; our goal is the city that is one day to be." For there is a supernatural process going on under the surface and within the substance of all things. In the Jerusalem of history we see the type and shadow of that Jerusalem of Heaven that St John of Patmos tells of in the Apocalypse. "I, John," he says, "saw in my vision that holy city which is the new Jerusalem, being sent down by God from Heaven, like a bride who has adorned herself to meet her husband." This is the spiritual city that is involved eternally with the historical one. It is the city of David, the city of God's people in exile: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy." It is the city of Jesus, not only of his death, but of his rising again alive. It is the New Jerusalem which we seek with our faith, and which is the goal of our pilgrimage to this old Jerusalem of history. "What is faith?" said St Paul. "It is that which gives substance to our hopes, which convinces us of things we cannot see."' (p.199)

I have quoted this passage at length because it shows the novel's engagement with the Bible through its linking of scripture to physical presence in an historically determined place. It also shows how Muriel Spark draws on another kind of text, the mode of the sermon.

There is a danger of implying that the sermon provides an answer to all the questions posed in the novel rather than clues leading the reader to formulate possible answers to some of them. Ruth Whittaker's reading suggests that the text is monoglossic with authorial control asserted through the preacher. The accusation of dogmatism has been levelled against the novelist by several critics; Elizabeth Dipple gives one of the fullest, most interesting statements of this case. It includes:

> In Spark's case, the narrator always assumes a flirtatious charm that relies on its sexual impact. The saucily impertinent voice never considers neutrality through the persuasion of either a reasoned argument or significant demonstration (which since Henry James has been the preferred form).[9]

While it is possible to see how this might be a response to, for instance, the gleeful, first person narrators of *Loitering With Intent* and *A Far Cry From Kensington*, it denies the differences which exist between the narrative voices that are deployed in Muriel Spark's novels. One possible reason for the preference shown by several critics for *The Mandelbaum Gate* is that its narrator is closer than some of her others to the typically restrained narrators found in classic realist texts. But while readers since Henry James may have learnt how to enjoy his kind of leisurely unfolding of minute details of thought and feeling, that does not oblige every succeeding writer to adopt his methods. Muriel Spark's preference for fabulation over realism and, after *The*

Mandelbaum Gate, for brevity[10] does not preclude open-endedness and ambiguity; even the novels where authorial control is most evident are not dogmatic.

Elizabeth Dipple invokes Bakhtin's theories as a standard against which to judge the success of individual novelists:

> The monologic chooses to be limited and barren and, in Bakhtin's view can never be considered great literature. Frank Kermode attempts to redeem Spark from Bakhtin's monologic category by opening the one escape hatch Bakhtin built into his system. The monologic can be rescued through wit and irony, which can be seen to align Spark's work with carnival, another of Bakhtin's celebratory terms.[11]

There are many grounds on which the opening contention could be queried, including its postulation of a deliberate choice of limitation and barrenness. Wit and irony elude the monologic not only through association with carnival but through their recognition of more than one way of viewing the material presented. However, in relation to *The Mandelbaum Gate* it seems more pertinent to suggest that its intertextuality is another form of rescue from the monologic. Many voices speak in the text with Suzi Ramdez's being arguably as important as the preacher's. Because Muriel Spark is known to be a Catholic, there is a temptation for critics to identify any expression of a Christian viewpoint in her novels as carrying authorial endorsement, and indeed to see whole texts as manifestations of doctrinal orthodoxy. This is to ignore the complexity of her narrative methods and the difficulty readers encounter in trying to establish what resolutions, if any, can be found in her novels.

The force of prior habits of reading and of the desire to find corroboration of existing desires is evident when

misreadings occur. Frank Kermode is convinced of the importance of Jerusalem as a symbol of unity in *The Mandelbaum Gate*; in an essay in *Continuities* he says, 'God's plot is Jerusalem itself'[12]. He finds an equivalent unifying image in the linking of England and the Holy Land through wild flowers:

> And when trefoil, lady's-finger, viper's bugloss come from Gethsemane, the Mount of Olives, Siloam, these last names are touched, as they ought to be, by the commonplace; the English names rest on the holy places, as history and the world rest on Jerusalem.[13]

While this is moving, the names quoted are not actually given to the wild flowers planted in Joanna Cartwright's garden; they are recalled by Freddy from labels made by his great-aunt in England. The desire for unification of east and west, manifested by Frank Kermode, is represented in the novel without being wholeheartedly endorsed. It is represented through the figure of Freddy's second cousin and her planting of English wild flowers in India:

> The virgin cousin had expressed the sentiment that when she scattered these flowers abroad in the fields and sidewalks of India, she was doing something to unite East and West. Her father had shouted her down, in his fierce manner, denouncing the practice. "Never the twain shall meet -" he reminded her, as if the words were Holy Writ. (p.54-55)

The father's prejudice, his mistaking the writing of Kipling for a sacred text, is implicitly condemned through the brutal language associated with him, but the text does not invite easy identification with the daughter either. There is a kind of foolishness, as well as botanical muddle, about her aspiration, and the effect of the word 'virgin' is significant here, implying as it does powerlessness as well as innocence. By introducing

this figure the text again marks a distinction between recognition of connections and submerging of differences.

The comment in the text on the wild flowers in Joanna's garden makes a point rather different from Frank Kermode's:

> ...they had always looked very English set here in the garden above Jerusalem; they looked decidedly different, at all events, from what they had looked all over Palestine in the spring. (p.52)

The suggestion is that transplanting results in changed identity through absorption by the new context. This could apply to Christianity, transplanted from the intensity and fervour of its Middle Eastern origins to the tepid Anglicanism exemplified by Freddy and the Bells Sands Vaughans. The novel attacks the attitude of polite, restrained Britishness which sees enthusiasm for ideas as 'some tiresome deep conviction' (p.20) and religious seriousness as inadmissible in polite conversation. The accusation of tepidity is specifically levelled against the codes of behaviour of the British diplomat. The enduring colonial conceptions of self and "other", British and "foreign", can be seen as among the cultural texts drawn on in the novel. The British assumption of superior rationality combined with paternalistic irritation and indulgence when confronted by the colourful "excesses" of the "natives" is satirized through Freddy's thought processes as he walks in Jerusalem:

> The intensity at the gate was quite absurd. One could understand the border incidents where soldiers would flare up an incident suddenly and unaccountably. But there at the gate the precautions and suspicions of the guards were quite absurd. ...They dramatized everything. Why did people have to go to extremes, why couldn't they be moderate? (p.11)

The exclusion of 'border incidents', even though 'unaccountable', from the accusation of phony drama can be read as a comment on the respect for territorial demarcations that is a necessary concomitant of colonialism. Just as the complacent self-centredness of tourists who place the twentieth century 'due west of Acre' (p.91) is mocked, so is the assumption that Britain is the centre of the universe:

> "You never have a dull moment out here," Freddy said, meanwhile grinning at Barbara, who sat in the back with her suitcase and savoured Freddy's phrase "out here". Every place east of Europe or west of the Atlantic Ocean was more or less one of the colonies to Freddy. (p.165)

This aspect of Freddy's characterization draws on the stereotype of the chauvinistic, reserved Englishman, but it does so to challenge the cultural convention of assumed superiority.

In this novel Muriel Spark endows her characters with developing self-recognition. Freddy's self-accusation of being 'Neither hot nor cold' (p.223) is underscored by quotation from Clough:

> ...One has bowed and talked, till
> little by little,
> All the natural heat has escaped of the
> chivalrous spirit. (p.222)[14]

The parallels between Freddy and Claude in Clough's *Amours de Voyage* are remarkably close. Both, while travelling abroad, are stirred out of their habitual detachment by encountering danger and sexual passion. Neither is able to trust feeling and so loses the promised experience of love; Claude's final resignation could apply to Freddy: 'It is over, all that! I am a coward, and know it. /Courage in me could be only factitious, unnatural, useless'[15]. The stanza from which

Muriel Spark takes her quotation is comically applicable to Freddy's good manners, horror of extremes, and initial avoidance of involvement; it begins:

> Now supposing the French or the
> Neopolitan soldier
> Should by some evil chance come exploring
> the Maison Serny
> (Where the family English are all to
> assemble for safety),
> Am I prepared to lay down my life for
> the British female?
> Really, who knows? One has bowed and talked,
> till, little by little,
> All the natural heat has escaped of
> the chivalrous spirit.
> Oh, one conformed, of course; but one doesn't
> die for good manners,
> Stab or shoot, or be shot, by way of
> graceful attention.[16]

The capacity of both characters to change and to suffer eventually engages the sympathy of the reader, but in the stanza quoted Clough makes skilful use of his hexameters to evoke the world-weariness and elegant cynicism of the well-bred British male. In a review of *The Poems of Arthur Hugh Clough* Muriel Spark said, '*The Bothie* and *Amours de Voyage* are great narrative poems'[17]. It is clear that she drew on her stated admiration for some of Clough's qualities when formulating the complex mixture of attitudes and emotions attributed to Freddy.

Another key aspect of Freddy's construction comes through the use of quotation. He recites to Abdul Ramdez the poem by Browning which begins, 'As I ride, as I ride' (p.82), acknowledges that it is not considered a 'fine' poem, but claims, 'it's interesting because there are forty lines with the same rhyme'. There is a parallel between this

exercise of ingenuity and Freddy's own habits of composition, with which the novel opens:

> Sometimes instead of a letter to thank his hostess, Freddy Hamilton would compose a set of formal verses - rondeaux, redoubles, villanelles, rondels or Sicilian octaves - to express his thanks neatly. (p.9)

The aspiration to neatness rather than passionate utterance fits the depiction of the character as polite and lukewarm. As the novel progresses it is also implied that the control of ingenious verse forms serves as a safeguard, keeping dangerous emotions at bay. Within the "story", although not in the "discourse", the Browning quotation follows Freddy's exploits in Jordan. When it occurs in the text, the reader is gradually guided to recognize that Freddy is not his usual, calm self, and hence to appreciate the representation of a need for the exercise of rigid control.

The absorption in intricate verse forms, initially connected to tepid refinement, takes on another significance through Abdul's delighted recognition of its disinterestedness. This indicates how an attitude of mind that may be condemned as 'lukewarm' can also be considered admirable; the co-existence of contrary judgements is as feasible as the co-existence of contrary emotions. Abdul's response here helps the reader to grasp the significance of his construction as a character who eschews allegiance to any specific cause, preferring loose attachment to a multiplicity:

> ...he was fascinated by the entire vision of that state of heart in which one wrote to a Fellow of All Souls about a rhyme for Capricorn. It could not result in any large benefit to Hamilton or his friends, nor could this piece of information damage Hamilton's enemies. It was disinterested and therefore beautiful, even if it was useless to the immediate world. And

this was something Abdul could never make his middle-class Arab acquaintances understand - how it was possible to do things for their own sake, not only possible but sometimes necessary for the affirmation of one's personal identity. The ideal reposed in their religion, but somewhere in the long trail of Islam, the knack of disinterestedness had been lost, and with it a large portion of the joy of life. (p.88)

Pursuing ingenious rhymes for their intrinsic interest is different from dedication to spiritual ends, but here they are linked through their shared separation from material gain or triumph at the expense of others. The concept of disinterestedness and the struggle to find appropriate patterns of language are central features of T.S.Eliot's *Four Quartets*. The third section of 'Little Gidding' has particularly interesting parallels with *The Mandelbaum Gate*:

> There are three conditions which often look alike
> Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow:
> Attachment to self and to things and to persons,
> detachment
> From self and from things and from persons; and,
> growing between them, indifference
> Which resembles the others as death resembles life,
> Being between two lives - unflowering, between
> The live and the dead nettle.[18]

The word 'indifference' here seems akin to the biblical 'lukewarm'. A problem Eliot identifies is to distinguish between 'detachment', which may be construed as praiseworthy disinterest, and indifference; this potential confusion is reflected in the double reading of Freddy's character which is opened up in the course of the novel.

In Eliot's poem the 'three conditions' are linked to politics, as they are in the novel. The third stanza of 'Little Gidding' continues:

> This is the use of memory:
> For liberation - not less of love but expanding
> Of love beyond desire, and so liberation
> From the future as well as the past. Thus, love of a country
> Begins as attachment to our own field of action
> And comes to find that action of little importance
> Though never indifferent. History may be servitude,
> History may be freedom.

The distinction being made appears to be between personal history, with its restrictive bonds, and dispassionate understanding of the past, which may be the means of achieving liberation from blinkered patriotism. The novel, too, makes this distinction, engaging with the issue of how to achieve such liberation without loss of commitment. Since both texts confront questions of religious belief in the twentieth century and, as a consequence, relations between past and present, it is not surprising that parallels exist. It is even less surprising given Muriel Spark's estimate of T.S.Eliot as 'The major poet of our time'[19]. In one of her editorials for *The Poetry Review* she discusses writing as reassessment, which she saw as a feature of the literature of the first half of the twentieth century. The editorial includes:

> By far the most notable example of a reassessor is Mr T.S.Eliot the practical entirety of whose work constitutes an inestimably valuable reassessment of literature; the extent of Mr Eliot's influence upon poetry and poets is an indication of how the desire to create may thus be stimulated and maintained.[20]

Her own writing, too, manifests the stimulus of engagement with existing works of literature. However, in

the same editorial she observes, 'It is possible that the too ready acceptance of established precepts may be one of the causes of the inertia which is afflicting the creative writer of today'[21]; this affirms a distinction between imitation and critical reassessment, a view which is consistent with Wolfgang Iser's theory of the desirability of forging new combinations, not repeating existing formulas. In this respect, too, Muriel Spark's practice conforms to her principles as a critic.

Like Eliot, she does not confine her interest in religion to Christianity but recognizes links between faiths. In *The Mandelbaum Gate* there are references to texts by both Christian and Islamic mystics. The translation given from 'a book of mystical poetry by a Sufi woman mystic of the eighth century' (p.265) adds another dimension to the treatment of the concept of disinterestedness:

> O Lord, if I worship thee from fear of hell, burn me in hell, and if I worship you in the hope of heaven, reject me from heaven, but if I worship thee for thine own sake then do not withhold thyself from me in thine eternal beauty. (p.265)

The Cloud of Unknowing by a fourteenth-century English mystic also insists on the importance of worship for its own sake, not for the hope of reward: 'For virtue is nothing but an ordered, deliberate affection, plainly directed to God, for his own sake'[22]. A passage earlier in the novel draws together the religions of the middle east:

> In the deep hours, Mendel and Abdul, narcotically exalted, began to chant their Song of Freedom which never failed to hypnotize the audience by its depth of meaning, although the words of the song varied every time, being a spontaneous composition. But the notes of their chant were familiar, they were those of the

> mosques, the synagogues, and the churches of the Coptic, Syrian and Greek rites.... (p.110)

The house in Acre frequented by Abdul, Mendel and their friends is a cosmopolitan meeting place where Jews and Arabs mix, and the variety is augmented by 'Two Pakistanis, students from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem' (p.103). The biblical phrase, 'Considering the lilies' is described as, 'a well-worn remark in that house' (p.104), implying a positive reading of what might otherwise be seen as feckless indifference. Here, too, Muriel Spark seems intent on disturbing conventional responses. The Song of Freedom chanted by Mendel and Abdul is associated with an underlying unity linking different religions; the inference is that hostility between religious groups derives from the loss of disinterestedness implicit in spirituality and a false identification of material interests with allegiance to a particular creed.

The English mediaeval mystic's text is specifically referred to in *The Mandelbaum Gate* when Freddy's memories are said to return 'like a cloud of unknowing' (p.141). The image of a cloud derives biblical authority from the account of the transfiguration of Christ as it is given in St Luke's Gospel, and this passage is quoted in the novel on the occasion of Barbara's visit to Mount Tabor:

> ...There came a cloud and overshadowed them. And they were afraid when they entered into the cloud.
>
> And a voice came out of the cloud, saying "This is my beloved Son. Hear him." (p.48)[23]

The cloud that comes 'between you and God'[24] is an image of the limits of human comprehension, the limitation accepted by Muriel Spark in her statement that the ending of the *Book of Job* 'represents something beyond the reach of discourse'[25]. Towards the end of the novel Barbara is

depicted as coming to accept unknowing: 'Knots were not necessarily created to be untied. Questions were things that sufficed in their still beauty, answering themselves' (p.277-278). Elsewhere in the text questions are posed urgently and insistently. The difficulty of distinguishing between polite enquiry and interrogation introduces the power politics of fascism: '"I ask her a question, she makes a big thing of it that I am Gestapo," said the guide to some invisible witness' (p.27). Two other references to the Gestapo implicate the British:

> "...Makes you feel like the bloody Gestapo when you've got to do a thing like this and report an ordinary conversation with one of your own chaps." (p.119)
>
> "My God!" said Barbara, "Don't tell me there's a British Gestapo keeping track of us all when we go abroad." (p.261)

The central interrogation of the text is the trial of Eichmann and these other references to the Gestapo are crucial in their refusal to limit the charge of surveillance and coercion to states conventionally termed totalitarian. By referring to the trial as 'a subject for a Christian pilgrim' (p.175), the novel encourages readers to consider it in a wider context than that of the specific conflict between Nazis and Jews. The concluding comment at the end of the episode, 'It was a highly religious trial' (p.180), is the culmination of several parallels between the trial and the rituals of religion. Formal interrogations are a feature of acts of worship and remembrance as well as of court procedures; there is a reminder of this in the novel in the reference to 'questions and answers in the old Hebraic mode' (p.50). A range of intertexts is invoked to reinforce the religious connotations of the trial.

The defence lawyer is temporarily likened to a priest; although his action is immediately transformed into a different mode, the image serves to forge one of the links between religious and legal ritual:

> The large black-robed counsel for the defence stood facing them, every now and then raising both arms as if bestowing a benediction upon the signs and tokens of his proper business in life, those carefully numbered documents on a lectern before him, but in reality simply jerking his arms free of the overlapping sleeves of his gown. (p.178)

While the lawyer is restored to the secular world, Eichmann is not: 'He was not answering for himself or his own life at all, but for an imperative deity named Bureau IV-B-4, of whom he was the High Priest' (p.179). In conjoining Eichmann and Priest the novel is wrestling with the problem of distinguishing between different acts of service and allegiance. It implicitly raises the troubling possibility of there being no moral distinction between serving God and a fascist state; this is the problem identified by John Frow[28] as a consequence of intertextuality, but which he argues does not eliminate the need to choose between different forms of power. The sense of moral vacuum is enhanced by reference to a play by Samuel Beckett:

> - What are we waiting for?
> - We're waiting for Godot. (p.180)

It suggests the possibility that all trustful waiting is in vain because what is awaited is a fabrication, not God but Godot. The denial of hope and purpose is strengthened through the comparison of the trial to other contemporary texts:

> She thought, it all feels like a familiar dream, and presently located the sensation as one that the anti-novelists induce. Or it is like, she thought, one of the new irrational films which people can't understand

the point of, but continue to see; one can neither cope with them nor leave them alone. At school she usually took the novels and plays of the new French writers with the sixth form. She thought, repetition, boredom, despair, going nowhere for nothing, all of which conditions are enclosed in a tight, unbreakable statement of the times at hand. (p.177)

Philip Toynbee reports that in an interview Muriel Spark expressed admiration for Alain Robbe-Grillet and said while discussing her own writing, 'In the early fifties there was no Robbe-Grillet and scarcely anyone had heard of Beckett. Hardly anyone was trying to write novels with the compression and obliqueness I was aiming at'[27]. The link between their writing and hers is not just formal - 'compression and obliqueness'; they all address metaphysical questions even if they reach different answers.

The fear of ultimate meaninglessness presented through the scene of the trial is not mitigated by easy solutions. Towards the end of the novel it is referred to in a powerful image:

> She was thinking of the Eichmann trial, and was aware that there were other events too, which had rolled away the stone that revealed an empty hole in the earth, that led to a bottomless pit. So that people drew back quickly and looked elsewhere for reality, and found it, and made decisions, in the way that she had decided to get married, anyway. (p.283)

Again Eichmann is associated with religion through the image of the stone rolled away, but here, instead of St Luke's empty tomb or the angel of St Matthew and St Mark, there is a 'bottomless pit'; the words used associate the idea of doubt or meaninglessness with hell. In the trial scene the death of Christ is implicitly linked to the death of one of Eichmann's supposed victims:

A searchlight from the city of Jerusalem in Israel, 1961: the voice of the presiding judge was uttering a question:

You mean, that the remark that the man is dead, in spite of all the tonics administered to the man, was also part of the information received by you from the General Government?

> The witness, having sprung to attention, gave formal ear to this speech from an alien cult concerning a man being dead. (p.179)

The doubleness of reference is sustained here for 'alien cult' ostensibly refers to the ritual of law but clearly also implies the Christian belief in the death of Christ, of God as 'the man'. Earlier the text says, 'the actual discourse was a dead mechanical tick, while its subject, the massacre, was living' (p.177). This, too, could be read in different ways; one reading is that the significance of the holocaust remains active and has power to affect people emotionally, in contrast to the desiccated language used in the court; another reading, and one which gains point through the subsequent references to Christ, is that it alludes to the orthodox Christian belief in the risen God. By making the reader struggle to understand the significance given to the Eichmann trial, the text avoids dogmatism. The references to Christian belief are tentative, not assertive, and the possibility of meaninglessness is not denied; rather, it is recoiled from.

In Muriel Spark's novels absence of belief is less dangerous than misplaced belief. Given the difficulty of distinguishing between the two, or even of accepting the validity of such distinctions, it is not surprising that her texts manifest the difficulty of the enterprise. In *The Mandelbaum Gate* a connection is forged between Eichmann and the British spies through the motif of the

letter-box; Bureau IV-B-4 'only served as a kind of through station, transit station' (p.179) and the Gardnors' activities hinged on the use of 'Nasser's Post Office' (p.191). They are depicted as loyal to something essentially lifeless, a 'system':

> He then sat down and patiently expounded, once more, the complex theology in which not his own actions, nor even Hitler's, were the theme of his defence, but the honour of the Supreme Being, the system, and its least tributary, Bureau IV-B-4. (p.179)

Another link between Ruth Gardnor and the Nazis is their hatred of Jews and their construction of Jewish conspiracy theories. Without these connections the Gardnors might have been represented as admirable in their freedom from bigoted loyalty to their place of birth in contrast to Eichmann's blind devotion. This reflects a potential ambivalence in the depiction of religious believers for their faith could also be presented as either bigotry or a freely made act of choice. In order to separate Barbara from both Eichmann and Ruth Gardnor, the text emphasizes that she is capable of doubt, but, more importantly, that she is moved by love. Those whose belief is depicted as falsely placed are shown as incapable of 'unknowing' and as guided by hatred. This reading is reinforced by the sermon:

> We know the creed of our faith and what we believe. Outside of that it is better to know what is doubtful than to place faith in uncertainties. Doubt is the prerogative of the believer; the unbeliever cannot know doubt. And in what is doubtful we should doubt well.... (p.199)

Different modes of 'knowing' are linked in the novel to different kinds of belief. The mode of intellectual enquiry which is necessary for 'thesis-writing' is depicted as limited when Barbara is introduced as one

whose 'habits of mind were inadequate to cope with the whole of her experience' (p.23). Reliance on logic and a desire for certainty are, however, most strongly represented through the construction of Ricky as a character. Her rigidity and moral certainty are associated with religious non-conformism when she is described as 'a lapsed Congregationalist with a puritanical bias' (p.155). As in *The Only Problem*, Protestantism is identified with reliance on individual conscience and the associated danger of self-deception. There is no 'unknowing' in her: 'She assumed that it was both right that people should tear themselves to bits about their motives and possible for them to make up their minds what their motives were' (p.161). This is contrasted with Roman Catholicism as it is represented through Barbara's thought processes:

> To Barbara, one of the first attractions of her religion's moral philosophy had been its recognition of the helpless complexity of motives that prompted an action, and its consequent emphasis on actual words, thoughts and deeds; there was seldom one motive only in the grown person; the main thing was that motives should harmonize. (p.161)

'Buxom' Ricky (p.246), with her 'virile ways and blunt intellect' (p.242) and 'dark-shadowed' (p.161) legs, conspicuously lacks grace and harmony. She is the butt of humour, comic in her seduction and in the failure of her attempt to prevent the annulment of Harry Clegg's marriage. Through her representation the text again affirms the limitations of scholarship when separated from emotion:

> Ricky's own books, clean and bright, lined the walls to the ceiling. Ricky had no doubt read most of them, closed them, and put them away, unchanged by them as they were by the passage of the years. (p.161-162)

The significance of her 'lapsed' faith is that she is presented as a woman who relies on her own powers of reason while retaining a 'puritanical' self-righteousness. By making this rigid, comic character representative of Protestantism, the novel loads the dice in favour of Catholicism.

Ricky may be compared with Jean Brodie as another treatment of the spinster[28] school-teacher. There are marked differences between the two creations; Jean Brodie is certainly 'changed' by the books she reads. There is no suggestion that her irresponsibility, nor her inspirational teaching methods, are shared by Ricky; indeed, the later novel is not concerned with education, only with certain mental habits that some teachers are said to possess. The main point of similarity between the two is their attempt to control the lives of other characters. David Lodge sees this as the most crucial aspect of Jean Brodie's construction and the one which leads to the perceived need for her 'betrayal', even though, as he says, several alternative readings are embedded in the text:

> There is, then, plenty of evidence for a clinical psychological explanation of Miss Brodie's conduct, but Sandy's religious interpretation has the most force. Miss Brodie, she realizes, has created her own secular religion of which she is simultaneously the God, Redeemer and minister of the elect. She tries to create the girls in her own image, and to direct their destinies according to her own divine plan.[29]

The failure of both Jean Brodie's and Ricky's plots is a critique of the aspiration to control the future, to play the role of 'the God of Calvin'[30].

Muriel Spark's concern with Calvinism and puritanism is tied up with her Edinburgh upbringing. It is all too easy

to simplify what she says about this inheritance; David Lodge insists on the importance of moral ambiguity in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and on 'the way the authorial voice defeats the reader's expectation of clear and simple judgments'[31]. Similarly, her comments on Edinburgh printed in *Memoirs of a Modern Scotland* are ambivalent, at the same time critical and affectionate. The article, 'What Images Return', contains an interesting observation about the puritanism of Edinburgh:

> I think the puritanical strain of the Edinburgh ethos is inescapable, but this is not necessarily a bad thing. In the south of England the puritanical virtues tend to be regarded as quaint eccentricities - industriousness, for instance, or a horror of debt. A polite reticence about sex is often mistaken for repressions. On the other hand, spiritual joy does not come in an easy consistent flow to the puritanically-nurtured soul. Myself, I have had to put up a psychological fight for my spiritual joy.[32]

The virtues she identifies as puritanical are civic, whereas the shortcomings are spiritual. While Ricky and Jean Brodie are portrayed with some affection, ultimately the religious dogmatism they stand for is rejected. In her novels Muriel Spark suggests the limitations of a purely intellectual approach, but in her article she recognizes a debt of gratitude to the climate of intellectual rigour in which she grew up: 'I imbibed, through no particular mentor, but just by breathing the informed air of the place, its haughty and remote anarchism'[33]. The deconstruction of received opinions which is a feature of her novels can be related to this proudly asserted anarchism.

Ricky is a relatively minor character in *The Mandelbaum Gate* who functions partly as a foil to Barbara, emphasizing the latter's capacity for change. Barbara's

increasing trust in providence is affirmed through the repetition, 'With God, everything is possible' (p.244 and 245), 'with God, all things are possible' (p.263) and 'all things are possible with God...' (p.263), variations on *Matthew* chapter 19 verse 26. Reliance on God rather than on human capacities is reinforced by quotation from *Ecclesiastes*, 'the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong' (p.263)[34]. The phrase, 'She was trying to remember how it went on' (p.263) draws attention to the possible relevance of the original context of the quotation, and indeed, the exhortation to 'Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity'[35] is apt. Barbara's decision to marry and her acceptance of the ultimate mystery of God are in accord with the teachings of *Ecclesiastes*; all that humans can do, says the Preacher, is to live their lives, knowing that eventually they will die and that their knowledge is circumscribed.

Barbara's decision to marry is most crucially an affirmation of love. Even the cynicism of the poem by John Donne which is quoted, 'Goe and catch a falling starre, /Get with child a mandrake roote' (p.47), cannot prevail for 'It is impossible to repent of love. The sin of love does not exist' (p.47). There is ambiguity in the mode of these sentences; they are included in a passage narrated from Barbara's point of view, but they are unmarked, unlike the following sentence which includes 'she thought'. This, combined with the categorical nature of their assertions, makes them emerge with an implication of authorial endorsement. The quotation from Donne is ostensibly used to claim that repenting of love is as impossible as accomplishing the tasks he sets; however, because it is so likely to be recognized it also draws on knowledge of the rest of his oeuvre. Since he is widely known as the writer of some of the most

passionate, as well as complex, poems about love and about religious faith, the quotation, appearing as it does early in the text, signals the novel's concern both with these subjects and with the complexity of their treatment.

Barbara's story can be read as a quest for a unified identity; this entails reconciling secular love with her religious faith, and reference to Donne's poems assists such a reading. There are several stages in the accomplishment of the quest. The novel presents the experience of secular love for her 'red-brick genius' (p.47) as one way in which a sense of identity may be achieved, overcoming the boundaries of class as well as religion: 'she suddenly felt to be insignificant the business of being a gentile and a Jewess, both and neither, and that of being a wolf in spinster's clothing' (p.47). An acceptance of irrationality, of adventurousness and trusting to fate, marks another stage:

> For the first time since her arrival in the Middle East she felt all of a piece; Gentile and Jewess, Vaughan and Aaronson; she had caught some of Freddy's madness, having recognized by his manner in the car, as they careered across Jerusalem, that he had regained some lost or forgotten element in his nature and was now, at last, for some reason, flowering in the full irrational norm of the stock she also derived from: unselfquestioning hierarchists, anarchistic imperialists, blood-sporting zoophiles, sceptical believers - the whole paradoxical lark that had secured, among their bones, the sane life for the dead generations of British Islanders. She had caught a bit of Freddy's madness and for the first time in this Holy Land felt all of a piece, a Gentile Jewess, a private-judging Catholic, a shy adventuress. (p.164)

The frame of reference here widens from the individual to whole communities and nations. Unity is imaged not as the result of purification and alienation - the Nazi programme represented by Eichmann - but as the harmonization of diversity. The affection with which Abdul is presented reinforces the affirmation of complexity, of mixture rather than zealous, bigoted singularity. And the setting of 'this Holy Land', with its divided city of Jerusalem, embraces - even if it cannot resolve into harmony and unity - divisions, conflicts and diversity.

The final stage of Barbara's quest combines human and divine love:

> "Well, either religious faith penetrates everything in life or it doesn't. There are some experiences that seem to make nonsense of all separations of sacred from profane - they seem childish. Either the whole of life is unified under God or everything falls apart. Sex is child's play in the argument." She was thinking of the Eichmann trial.... (p.283)

The text uses the trial to construct a powerful presentation of the desolate meaninglessness of life based on hatred and on allegiance to a false creed. By suggesting that the only alternative is belief in God, within the confines of the novel it makes an unarguable case for the latter. The specific disease, scarlet fever, that afflicts Barbara is appropriate in that it connotes both the 'scarlet woman' of Rome - the Catholic church - and sexuality. Its further connotations of heat and blood distance her from the despised 'lukewarm', establishing her as one capable of the heat of sacred and profane love.

The novel's meditation about love is supported by the quotation from Dante's *Paradiso*, 'bound by love into one

volume' (p.26). The phrase comes in the final stanza of The *Divina Commedia* at the culmination of Dante's account of the experience of the divine when he is encouraged to look at the 'Infinite Goodness'[36]. The passage from which the quotation comes reads, in Charles Singleton's translation:

> O abounding grace whereby I presumed to fix my look through the Eternal Light so far that all my sight was spent therein.
>
> In its depths I saw ingathered, bound by love in one single volume, that which is dispersed in leaves throughout the universe: substances and accidents and their relations, as though fused together in such a way that what I tell is but a simple light. The universal form of this knot I believe that I saw, because, in telling this, I feel my joy increase.[37]

The importance of the image of the 'Book of Scripture' and the 'Book of Nature' has been discussed previously in this chapter. It gains added significance when seen in the context of Dante's poem, and its full resonance is explained by Ernst Robert Curtius in his study of the symbol of the book in the Middle Ages:

> Once again and for the last time, in the highest and most sacred ecstasy, Dante employs the symbolism of the book. All that has been scattered throughout the entire universe, that has been separated and dissevered, like loose *quaderni*, is now "bound in one volume" - by love: ...The book - *in quo totum continetur* - is the Godhead. The book is the symbol of the highest salvation and the highest value.[38]

The relation of *The Mandelbaum Gate* to this vision is equivocal. While it affirms the importance of love and of the 'Book of Scripture', in the twentieth century a novelist cannot write with such 'sacred ecstasy' in the confidence of speaking within a shared system of belief. The novel shows how difficult it is even to achieve

respect for differences and peaceful coexistence. Its narrative method as well as its argument celebrate diversity, not homogeneity. At the end of the narrative the characters which have been bound by the story into one volume are scattered like leaves, dispersed to Tangier, Athens, Cairo and London. The final image is of the Gate itself, 'hardly a gate at all but a piece of street between Jerusalem and Jerusalem' (p.304), an image of separation as well as connection. Jerusalem, evoked in the sermon as a symbol of origin and destiny, is also a focus of religious and racial conflict. The closing words, 'called by that name because a house at the other end once belonged to a Mr Mandelbaum' (p.304), signal the determining force of chance and contingency in human affairs.

CHAPTER THREE: VERSIONS OF THE SELF

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The construction of fictional characters necessarily refers to a conception of what a human being is. There is consequently a danger of stating the obvious in a chapter devoted to representations of the subject in fiction. Some justification of the enterprise is therefore needed and this will take the form of an explanation of the particular features of Muriel Spark's treatment of the subject which repay close attention.

The choice of a film star as protagonist in *The Public Image* allows for exploration of the construction of public personas. It also enables the author to consider various styles of performance and their application to a range of situations. This provides a framework for the deconstruction of such oppositions as public and private, image and reality, performance and sincerity. The privileging of "high" art over popular culture is also subjected to scrutiny in a text which explicitly delights in the world of movie magazines. This leads to engagement with images of glamour and celebrity and their textual construction in the late nineteen-sixties.

The texts emanating from psychoanalysis have had a dominant impact on the way in which human subjects have conceived of themselves in the twentieth century. Inevitably they have also had an impact on critical theories about the reading of literary texts. Within *The Hothouse by the East River* there is a critique of some of the theories and practices of psychoanalysis and a consideration of their relation to conceptions of time, decay, death and religious faith. A discussion of this

novel is therefore of value both in respect of its treatment of these ideas and in opening up questions about the application of psychoanalytic theory to reading and interpretation.

The final text chosen for inclusion in this chapter is *Loitering With Intent*. There was no doubt about its importance here because its metafictional treatment of the writing of fiction and autobiography raises central questions about our understanding of the self. These questions are explicitly related to different forms of written presentation. There is a further connection with self-presentation through acting and role play which is explored in the novel. It makes use of a number of literary intertextual references as a means of clarifying the issues raised; ~~they~~ these references also enable the novel to foreground processes of reading as well as writing. Scrutiny of these three texts should indicate the range and complexity of Muriel Spark's use of fictional form to engage with ideas about selfhood and challenge some conceptions which have been dominant in our culture.

3.2 *THE PUBLIC IMAGE*

The development of psychoanalysis has cast increasing doubt on the concept of unified selves. The text of *To The Lighthouse*, published in 1927, includes the words, 'nothing was simply one thing'[1]. In her critical writing Virginia Woolf extended this perception to the construction of fictional characters; her essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown' asserts that human character has changed and that this causes problems for novelists: '...you will see how keenly I felt the lack of a convention, and how serious a matter it is when the tools of one generation are useless for the next'[2]. She argued for the need to develop new forms of fiction which would manifest the complexity of current conceptions of the human individual. More recently the impact on literature of the ideas of Jacques Lacan and of Jacques Derrida has intensified the perception of division both within the psyche and within language. *The Public Image* participates in the questioning of the stability of human identity both at the level of "story" and at the level of "discourse". The choice of a film star as central character highlights ambiguity about what constitutes a person, and this is reinforced by an enigmatic narrative method.

In a study of filmic representations of women, Molly Haskell compares her own sense of self with the female types encountered on the screen. The basis of her comparison is a recognition of division:

> One of the definitions of the loss of innocence is perhaps the fragmenting of that unified self - a split that is different, and emblematic, not only for each sex, but also for each era. My own split, between the way I saw myself (as a free agent) and the way I was expected to behave (as a lady, deferential to

authority), was reflected, as such things often are, in the movies and in the parallel split between heroines.[3]

She conceives of the division as socially rather than psychologically constructed, and emphasizes the historical specificity of the depiction of women in film. Her account deals with the way different stars encapsulate alternative types of female. The projected personas of film stars have, however, also been seen as internally divided because of the gap portrayed between the public image and the private individual. One has only to think of the number of texts devoted to establishing the "real" Marilyn Monroe, or Norma Jean, to register the potency of this idea and of the desire to achieve a unified picture of the person. Such texts are predicated on acceptance of the authenticity of the private self and of the notion that this is overlaid, or masked, by a constructed image. While in *The Public Image* there is satire on the construction of false images for public consumption, this is not accomplished through a simplistic contrast with a private life deemed to be "authentic". Instead, the oppositions of public and private are subjected to a deconstructive scrutiny. Terry Eagleton's explanation of deconstruction includes the claim that it exposes the operation of ideology:

> 'Deconstruction, that is to say, has grasped the point that the binary oppositions with which classical structuralism tends to work represent a way of seeing typical of ideologies'[4].

The novel's analysis of binary oppositions, such as public versus private, conforms to this account for it exposes the interests and power bases that they sustain.

A focus on film stars also provides a means of bringing together the concerns of high art and popular culture. This is manifest in the novel's interest in the consumption as well as in the production of star images.

Muriel Spark is reported as saying to Philip Toynbee in 1971, 'I love the glossies and the newspapers and the film mags; and that's where I find a lot of my material'[5]. The engagement with popular forms of pleasure is evident throughout her oeuvre; here it takes the shape of an exploration of the pleasures derived from reading about celebrities. Richard Dyer in *Stars*[6] says that their appeal is based on a combination of glamour and ordinariness. To this end, stars are seldom depicted at work; they are shown as consumers enjoying lavish lifestyles. On the other hand, there is salacious relish of their emotional disasters. In this respect stars may be seen to have a use-value similar to that of the more glamorous soap operas, such as the now defunct *Dallas* and *Dynasty*. The vicarious, and possibly envious, enjoyment of wealth is offset by the depiction of emotional frailty and by the enactment of structures of feeling which are shared by the audience.

The class implications of the emotions aroused in viewers are considered by John Fiske and John Hartley in their book, *Reading Television*. They argue against equating the class position of the medium with the class depicted within stories:

> The *mass* medium is paradoxically classless - in the sense that most of its content derives from the experience of and is directed towards the members of what we can now see is the class to which the vast majority of us belong: the subordinate class *in itself*.[7]

Their presumed television audience is the same as the target audience for glossy images of film stars. The rise of Annabel in *The Public Image* from nonentity to star echoes the motif of the "ordinary" girl discovered by a movie director which appeared frequently in film magazines of the period. It is a story which gratifies fantasies of

becoming a star by emphasizing that extraordinary wealth, skill and intelligence are not prerequisites. The pattern of identification played out through such narratives is also animated by watching soap operas; this is discussed by Ien Ang in relation to *Dallas*. She explains how it may be consolatory to watch the suffering of others depicted in a fictional mode:

> It may well be, then, that these identifications can be pleasurable, not because they imagine the utopia to be present, but precisely because they create the possibility of being pessimistic, sentimental or despairing with impunity - feelings which we can scarcely allow ourselves in the battlefield of actual social, political and personal struggles, but which can offer a certain comfort if we are confronted by the contradictions we are living in.[8]

John Fiske and John Hartley stress the pleasure of communal sharing, which they see as a crucial component of the audience's experience:

> It is important to remember that the "bargaining, interaction and exchange" of the communication process *itself* functions as part of the entertainment, bonding us as viewers, via the message, to the reality of our culture, and thus lifting the burden of an isolating individualism from our shoulders.[9]

The Public Image does not offer its readers comfort of this kind. Rather, such pleasures are part of its subject, to be scrutinized, not enacted. It observes popular consumption with interest but does not participate in the same kind of project.

Divisions within the star persona are not confined to glamour versus ordinariness and public versus private; there is a further confusion between actor and role. In this respect the distinction between film stars and other actors is crucial. In the theatre it is impossible to

achieve the sense of intimacy which cinematic close-ups help to construct and audiences are usually aware that the actor is playing a part. Indeed, much of their pleasure comes from recognizing the skill exerted by the actor in creating that part. In film, on the other hand, audiences frequently blur the distinction between character and actor and this tendency is exploited in the construction of recognizable images for stars. Typically this leads to type-casting so that the audience's desire to identify with the star will not be disrupted by the playing of unfamiliar roles. This in turn intensifies the confusion between star and character.

Richard Dyer considers such confusions when he argues that our understanding of what we are as humans is troubled and unclear, and that the difficulty we all have in distinguishing a concept of self separable from the roles we play is reflected in doubts surrounding the notion of what, or who, film stars "really" are:

> This sense of crisis as to what a person is seems to me to be central also to the star phenomenon. It can be seen to lie behind star charisma as a generalised phenomenon, in that stars speak centrally to this crisis and seem to embody it or to condense it within themselves. How they speak to, embody or condense it may be predominantly in terms of reaffirming the reality of people as individuals or subjects over against ideology and history, or else in terms of exposing precisely the uncertainty and anxiety concerning the definition of what a person is. Whether affirming or exposing, or moving between the two, stars articulate this crisis always through the cultural and historical specificities of class, gender, race, sexuality, religion, sub-cultural formations, etc. Yet all stars seem to me to work also at the more general

> level - itself culturally and historically specific - of defining what a person is.[10]

The treatment of 'what a person is' in *The Public Image* is made culturally and historically specific. The choice of an English actress working in Italy as central character enables the text to reflect a series of culturally constructed differences, and to play on the contrast between stereotypical concepts of the English and the Italian, or Latin, temperament. Equally, if not more, significant is its treatment of the relative cultural seriousness accorded to women and men, and more specifically female "stars" as opposed to male "actors". Its contemporary setting allows for a criticism of current hierarchies of value.

That Muriel Spark was consciously embarking on a new venture is evidenced by the unusually long gap which occurred between the publication of *The Mandelbaum Gate* in 1965 and this novel in 1968. The later novel presents a challenge to the ideas and methods of the earlier one, and in particular to its relatively confident construction of character. The questions it raises about whether there is a private, authentic self separable from the way people perform or appear to others are made evident in the episode when members of the press arrive to interview Annabel after her husband's death:

> There they found Annabel suitably arranged, with her neighbours now suddenly silent, sitting and standing around her with folded hands, hands open as if in appeal for pity, hands crosssed on breasts, hands at throats in the gesture of sudden disaster, hands in despair, holding the side of the head, and in every other spontaneous attitude of feeling by which they could convey to the newcomers their sense of plight and solidarity with the bereft woman, just as successfully

> as if the scene had been studied and rehearsed for weeks. (p.68)

The long, flowing sentence is full of unexpected reversals. It is usual to compare staged performances with so-called real life to test their credibility, but here the behaviour of the neighbours is tested for 'success' against the criterion of theatre. The description of their gestures prepares the way, for they are shown assuming stock attitudes and grouped as though on a stage. These neighbours are not constructed as friends who might be expected to feel genuine emotion at what has happened; rather, they are made to manifest a sense of decorum, of what it is proper to do at such times. The word 'spontaneous' comes as a surprise after the theatrical description of stereotyped gestures. While it seems ironic given the absence of genuine grief, it emphasizes that this is a description of unscripted behaviour. It also draws attention to the implicit question of whether human behaviour is always an assumption of the performance which seems most appropriate in the circumstances.

Although the performances of the neighbours are unscripted, they are nevertheless contrived. In inviting them into her flat at such a time, Annabel is shown deliberately preparing for the spectacle which they create. Muriel Spark makes Annabel and her neighbours collaborate in the drama they enact for the press:

> The neighbours, with their instinct for ceremony and spectacle, had ranged those chairs which they had brought from their own best rooms in two semi-circles which flanked the best chair of all; this was upholstered in red velvet, and its arms were antiquely carved. With equal instinct, Annabel sat on this best chair and adjusted the baby. (p. 67)

The use of the word 'instinct', like 'spontaneous', appears to contradict the contrivance of the scene, but

only if we think of instinct as a manifestation of private emotional drives; here instinct is directed towards participation in a social ritual. Moreover, each participant shares in the common understanding of what is required to such an extent that no discussion is necessary for them to play their part well in the scene anticipated by Annabel.

At many points the novel insists that performance and feeling cannot be separated. When it describes Annabel leaving the hospital after identifying Frederick's corpse, the route leads via a morgue and Annabel assumes that the people escorting her are trying to distract her attention from the bodies; however, the text continues:

> But now she saw that one of the nurses was weeping, and at last came round again to the conclusion that these people were trying to console her.
>
> She responded then, and did it well, and was genuinely glad to cry... . (p.59-60)

On this occasion Annabel recognizes the performance, crying, required by social convention only when 'prompted' by the crying nurse, but no sooner does the reader register this than the text asserts the genuineness of Annabel's need to cry. A humorous extreme in the handling of the notion of performance comes in a description of Annabel's baby:

> She changed the baby while he howled anger, rage, and all other synonyms for these words, pausing only for breath and louder strength. Then she put the bottle to his mouth, and with a final grunt as if to bring the performance to an end artistically, he sucked and forgave. (p.53)

This suggests that from birth we have to find ways of performing that will be socially understandable and effective. Muriel Spark's treatment of such ideas raises the question of what could be meant by 'authentic action'.

The following passage implies the irrelevance of such a concept: 'She looked at him and was taken more than ever by his role as a man of theory - for she thought of appearances in this way, they were "roles"; and whether or not he was a man of theory was irrelevant' (p.21). This seems to assert that if all we can know of others is ~~through~~ their behaviour, only behaviour matters. It is reinforced by the words used earlier in the novel when describing Frederick's notion of his innate ability:

> Frederick, however, held to a theory that a random collision of the natal genes had determined in him a bent for acting only substantial parts in plays by Strindberg, Ibsen, Marlowe and Chekhov (but not Shakespeare); and so far as that went he was right, everything being drably right in the sphere of hypotheses, nothing being measurably or redeemably wrong. (p.10)

Pretentiousness is implied by the list of acceptable writers; presumably Shakespeare is rejected as too commonplace. The surprising use of 'drably' enforces the tedious irrelevance of inner conceptions of the self which are never externalized in action, or at least their irrelevance to others. It also suggests the boring frequency of self-estimations which exceed accomplishment, estimations which cannot be challenged because they exist independently of any external measure.

In *The Public Image* only male characters are depicted as making claims for themselves that cannot be tested. They are mocked for their assumption of intellectual superiority and for the desire to claim originality and authenticity for actions that are shown to be derivative and stereotypical:

> Thought is a painful activity. Frederick had largely given it up, and, guiltily concealing this fact from himself, had opened his feelings to pain. He was easily

hurt. When Annabel, on reading the script, said, "It's good, it's like *The Turn of the Screw* isn't it?" he was furious. (p.16)

His fury at the exposure of his lack of originality is compounded by rage that the wife he considers stupid actually knows about *The Turn of the Screw*. It transpires that she has not read the book but has seen the film, and this information draws attention to the higher status conventionally accorded to those who read books, and their surprise when confronted by alternative sources of learning in our culture. Claims to moral superiority are also ridiculed through Frederick:

> At this point in the film story, Frederick's script had been to many alteration-hands; and the final version approved by the American Corporation which was putting the bulk of the money into it at first moved Frederick to request that his name be removed from the billing. But later, when publicity for the film became rife, he got his name put back again. (p.19)

The cynical opportunism described here is at odds with the high-mindedness of Frederick's supposed self-image. Through his representation the novel exposes the human capacity for self-delusion and testifies to the importance of relying on what can be seen and judged.

Luigi, the Italian film producer, while he differs from Frederick in terms of success and power, is shown as similar in his desire to appear more original than he is. The comparison is made explicit when Annabel says to him, 'Well, isn't that the theme of *Pygmalion*?' (p.34) and the passage continues:

> She spoke a fraction too soon, because, by the time she recalled how furious Frederick had been that time she had said of his script "It's a bit like *The Turn of the Screw*, isn't it?" Luigi was already talking defensively .... Luigi, ten to the dozen, refuted the imputation

> that any idea of his was not absolutely original. (p.34)

The intertextual reference to *Pygmalion*, a story which deals with the usurpation of God's power to create life, strengthens the exposure of masculine hubris. It is significant that Luigi is made to claim, 'Before I made you the Tiger-Lady, you didn't even look like a lady in public, never mind a tiger in private. It's what I began to make of you that you've partly become' (p.34). As in *Pygmalion*, the artist is male and the creation is female; the text here exposes the myth of masculine dominance and the idea that women merely reflect male desire. There is a further irony in that during the conversation leading to Annabel's exposure of his derivative thinking, Muriel Spark has depicted Luigi as the archetypal Italian seducer. Even his choice of assumed name reinforces Italian stereotypes. 'Luigi Leopardi' echoes a name like 'Marcello Mastroianni' and also uses the title of one of the most famous of Italian novels. Moreover, the film version of *The Leopard*, starring Claudia Cardinale, was a popular success released in 1963. His choice of the epithet 'English Lady-Tiger' for Annabel is yet another reference to large cats; the association of cats and women is itself hardly original enough to justify Luigi's pride in his invention. The use of such clichés emphasizes the gap between the exaggerated claims people make for themselves and the banality of what they achieve.

The novel's deconstruction of claims to originality and authenticity is extended by its assertion that life follows fiction. The power of popular art forms which draw on stereotypes is that they are readily absorbable as blue-prints of appropriate behaviour. Their power comes, the text implies, not just through reflecting how people wish to see themselves but through convincing them that

the reflection actually is of themselves. Muriel Spark writes of this with acerbic humour:

> It was somehow felt that the typical Englishman, such as Frederick Christopher was, had always really concealed a foundry of smouldering sex beneath all that expressionless reserve. It was suggested in all the articles that cited the Christopher image, that this was a fact long known to the English themselves, but only now articulated. Later, even some English came to believe it, and certain English wives began to romp in bed far beyond the call of their husbands, or the capacities of their years, or any of the realities of the situation. (p.28)

The ridicule of this behaviour, however, depends on the notion of a norm, of 'realities', that exist independently of the perception of 'certain English wives', but what that norm is and how it can be known are cast into doubt by the rest of the text.

The division between the narratives of daily life and the narratives of art is confused in a different way when Annabel is shown experiencing the events of her life as though they are part of a film. Muriel Spark describes Annabel's return home after identifying Frederick's body in a passage made conspicuous by its relatively ornate language:

> She ... was driven home through the inter-twining dark-lit streets, under the high-flying white flags of washing that swayed from window to window of the old palaces. The poisoner behind the black window-square, a man flattened against a wall with the daggers ready ... she wondered how the film would end, and although she wanted to leave the cinema and go home, she wanted first to see the end. They drove round a deserted piazza with a fountain playing heartlessly, its bowl upheld by a group of young boys, which was built by the

> political assassin to placate his conscience; and past the palace of the cardinal who bore the sealed quiet of the whole within his guilt; with that girl now binding his body with her long hair for fun; while he lay planning, with a cold mind, the actions of the morning which were to conceal the night's evil: calumny, calumny, a messenger here and there, many messengers, bearing whispers and hints, and assured, plausible eye-witness accusations; narrow streets within narrower; along beside the fearful walls of the Cenci palace, in one of the lanes where she had run from the party, looking for a taxi. The camera swung round to the old ghetto. Fixed inventions of deeds not done, accusations, the determined blackening of character. (p.60)

Rome itself is seen as protean; it is not a fixed reality but a site for stories, its image constructed through stories. It is no accident that Muriel Spark's use of the definite article here - '*the* political assassin', '*the* cardinal' - is reminiscent of Ezra Pound's use of it in 'Provincia Deserta' - '*The* Dauphin', 'He won *the* lady'[11] - for in both cases the article infers that the stories are so well known that they need no rehearsing. And even if they are not recognized, they establish the textual basis for our conception of places as well as of history. Because a sense of place is inseparable from knowledge of past stories located there, the present and the past are inextricably intertwined through the medium of story. This fusion is enacted earlier in the text when Muriel Spark writes, 'those narrow lanes intertwining with narrow lanes, the twisty minds of history' (p.41). In both cases the city is anthropomorphized and seems endowed with some of the feelings that are lacking in the humans who occupy it. Annabel's vision of a menacing city is informed by stories which match the melodrama of recent incidents in her own life. The repetitions of 'calumny' and 'messenger'

are pertinent to her situation too, for her career has been constructed through the 'messengers' of publicity and is vulnerable to destruction through their 'calumny'. Referring to her 'public image' Luigi tells her, 'You've been built up on that, so you can fall down on that' (p.122). The echo here of 'all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword'[12] might appear by comparison to trivialize Annabel's plight; it nevertheless attests to the power of stories and consequently to the destructive power of calumny. The text reminds us that our understanding of the past is based on narratives and these may indeed be vindictive fictions.

The idea that while living we are playing a part in a film may be recognizable as a response to the kind of dramatic event encountered more often in art than in life. However, Muriel Spark does not restrict the confusion between acting and living to melodramatic incidents. Her depiction of Annabel's ability to buy an Italian flat provides another occasion for this kind of confusion, or inter-relation:

> Maybe I am strong, she had thought, when she arranged, all on her own, to buy the flat. She spoke Italian ungrammatically but fluently, accompanied by appropriate gestures, exactly as if she were acting a part as an Italian. Something about this act of miming, and the rattle of her tongue as the words came out, influenced her to think somewhat in the Italian mode. At all events, she managed to engage a lawyer and acquire the flat, both at a good price. This was a more difficult feat for a foreigner, and a famous one, and moreover, a woman, than she knew. (p.36-37)

This passage prompts questions as to whether there can be any definition of strength separable from evident accomplishment, and whether there is any meaning in an opposition between playing a part and being oneself.

Annabel is depicted as conscious of assuming the characteristics of an Italian when speaking their language; what is implied but not stated is that we somehow play ourselves, or conform to an image of our own nationality, when speaking our mother tongue.

The doubt in this novel about human identity is reflected in stylistic ambiguity. The narrative voice appears at first to have the authority and omniscience of the narrator of *The Mandelbaum Gate*. However, assertions such as 'She realized that he was obsessed with her' (p.29) reveal an ambiguity as to whose view is being expressed; it is unclear whether we are being told that he *is* obsessed with her or that she *thinks* he is. There appears to be an unmarked transition from the narrator's viewpoint to Frederick's in the following passage: 'Twice he made huge scenes in public. Then he was infuriated by Annabel's alarm. A proper wife would have pacified him, not remonstrated with him about what people would say' (p.30). It seems probable, although it is not stated, that it is Frederick rather than the narrator who has this idea of how a 'proper wife' ought to behave. Ambiguity at this level of narration unsettles the reader's confidence. This is particularly evident in relation to a sweeping judgement made early in the text - 'Annabel had played small parts in British films, always being cast as a little chit of a thing, as she was' (p.7). At this stage the reader has no information to contradict a statement which nevertheless sounds surprisingly dismissive. As the novel progresses Annabel is increasingly presented as a powerful woman. What then does 'a little chit of a thing' mean? Is it a reference to her physique? Is the emphasis on 'she *was*'? Neither explanation is wholly satisfactory; the effect of such doubt is to emphasize the likelihood of misjudging people, particularly if, like Frederick's, judgements are based on the idea of knowing what someone

is independently of what they do. When he is made to tell Annabel 'you are *in*significant yourself' (p.16) he cannot be referring to her relative success in acting, nor her growing fame; his comment is based on a conception of her essential being and through him the text challenges the notion that human beings can know and judge each other in this way.

The absence of division between acting and being which the novel presents in Annabel is more startling than the idea of their separation as presented through Frederick. The difference constructed between these characters is manifested in their conceptions of what professional acting is all about. Annabel, although she appears to endorse Frederick's theatrical concept, 'because it was something she had heard continually since she attended the school of drama' (p.10), performs according to the conventions of film: 'In practice her own instinctive method of acting consisted in playing herself in a series of poses for the camera, just as if she were getting her photograph taken for private purposes' (p.10). This account of her style of performance corresponds to the description Richard Dyer gives of the development of intimacy with the advent of broadcasting; he observes:

> "Radio" or "Hollywood Studio" style meshes with the various star-audience relationships to construct performance which we experience analogously to our relationship to others in everyday interaction.[13]

The blurring of boundaries between role and self reaches out into wider confusions of being and behaving. Frederick's clarity of separation may represent one of the most powerful fictions through which we are able to create a much-needed sense of personal identity.

Tania Modleski in *The Women Who Knew Too Much* associates the split between styles of performance with gender

divisions. Although her categories are not the same as Richard Dyer's, they point to similar conclusions:

> The association of the drama with masculinity and of the theatre with femininity are old ones in Western culture. Women and the theatre are felt to be on the side of the inauthentic and the spectacular (the visible), whereas the drama is linked to authenticity, the Truth, and the Word.[14]

Recent film theory has contested the dominance of the idea that it is only women who are the object of the "gaze". Nevertheless, the identification of Frederick with words and with acting, or drama, and of Annabel with self-display before the camera, exposes and contests the values and gender assumptions which were prevalent when the novel was written.

Alan Kennedy sees Annabel as the 'nearest she [Muriel Spark] comes to offering a solution'[15], the problem being one of reconciling imaginative freedom and the outer world. He identifies this as a major preoccupation in her writing, saying:

> ... being oneself is not the source of evil after all. Rather it is the Romantic and Artistic idealisation of the imaginative self, and the belief in an undisciplined absolutely free creative self, which is the source of danger. For Muriel Spark, once again, absolute freedom is a fiction; which is not to say that it is not True or that it does not exist. The fiction of freedom, or the freedom of fiction has its own proper realm and rules. What Mrs Spark seems to be trying to make us grasp, by implication and suggestion - by Art and fiction - is that one needs as well as this inner freedom, a clear recognition of the outer world and a disposition to act in the real world without allowing our fictions to violate the uniqueness

> of other lives - whether the fictions be Artistic or Scientific ones.[16]

There is, however, a problem with Alan Kennedy's argument; if it is accepted that we organize our perceptions into fictional constructs, and indeed perceive through the medium of our existing fictions, it is difficult to conceive how we could fail to 'violate the uniqueness of other lives'. I'm not sure that Muriel Spark has an answer to this, but it is the kind of question posed by *The Public Image*. Perhaps the best we can manage is fictional constructions of others which incorporate the concept of their lives as unique. In his assessment of Annabel, Alan Kennedy presents a different idea of how to avoid falsification:

> Because she lacks imaginative "vision" she can see others clearly and, as a result, has no difficulty in acting, or in being herself which is the same thing. Because she can see others - which is not necessarily to say that she therefore knows them in any profound way, she merely recognises them as being there - she is willing, without having to think about it, to be seen by others. What is seen is no more than appearance, and is therefore not the whole of the self. What *The Public Image* reveals is that without "appearance" there can be no "reality".[17]

Much of this is persuasive and helpful and, unlike some other commentators on the novel, he sees in Annabel a portrayal of strength. However, his analysis raises further questions: what is meant by seeing others clearly? And what is meant by the word 'reality'? So far I have emphasized ways in which this novel collapses the boundaries drawn between authenticity and performance, public and private, fiction and reality, but there are ways in which those boundaries are confirmed and attending to these is necessary in order to explore more fully Alan Kennedy's interpretation and to see whether the novel does

indeed affirm a concept of 'reality'. This cannot be done without widening the scope of discussion so as to place what is said about the construction of character within the moral argument of the whole text.

From the opening scene Annabel's new flat is used as a means of exploring notions of privacy. There is an interesting observation on the transition of a dwelling from a place where 'everyone felt they could come and go, like the workmen and the removal men, without permission' (p.6) to its occupation as a private space. Although Annabel's flat is not yet furnished and made fully her own, the text creates a sense of privacy within it through images of sunny peacefulness, quietness and solitude. The description of Annabel looking after the baby is dwelt on at sufficient length to encourage the reader's sense of participation in a tranquil domestic scene:

> She filled the baby's bath and bathed him without answering his gurgles. Then she boiled his egg, two minutes, and fed him half of it. She prepared his milk food in the bottle and sat in the kitchen feeding him slowly. The baby looked happy and lost interest in the bottle when it was two-thirds finished. She laid him to sleep again on the pillow, pulled up the chair to watch him while he looked with surprise at a ribbon from his vest that his forefinger and thumb had contrived to lift. He started to squint at this ribbon, which presently dropped from his clutch, and his eyes closed in sleep. (p.44)

The emotional detachment and mechanical precision of the description constructs an image of the private Annabel as orderly and controlled, thus contradicting the glamorized 'Tiger-Lady' creation. The eruption into this scene of the party engineered by Frederick appears a rude violation of domestic privacy. The reader's sense of intrusion confirms the felt need for a space to inhabit closed off from

workmen and neighbours, a space inaccessible to the public gaze.

A separation between private life and public image is essential to the whole point of the story. We may fictionalize our private lives, but the fictions made by magazines out of the lives of celebrities are different, and the novel spells this out in the contrast between the married life of Frederick and Annabel and their image as the perfect couple. In describing the role created for Frederick it says:

> Well, in the event, Frederick found himself rooted deeply and with serious interest in a living part such as many multitudes believe exists: a cultured man without a temperament, studious, sportsmanlike, aristocratic, and a fatherly son of Mother Earth, Annabel's husband. (p.27)

As a professional creator of fictions, the novelist is not just interested in the process of image construction, but in a sense implicated. If a character is not 'such as many multitudes believe exists' it will be rejected as lacking credibility so novelists, like publicists, if they desire verisimilitude, have to work within the constraints of what is already conceived of as typically human. One crucial difference between them, however, is the acknowledgement by novelists that their work is fictional; publicity tends 'to violate the uniqueness of other lives' by deliberately confusing its own fictions with the subjects' conception of themselves, and in its attempt to deceive the audience by claiming the status of 'truth' for its own constructions.

Muriel Spark's treatment of the 'glossies' is not solemn and moralistic. There is a sense of gleeful delight in the profusion and exaggeration of their stories. Francesca's

knowing manipulation of the Christophers' image is introduced by:

> She knew the Italian magazines as well as they knew themselves, which is to say they knew no other type of vitality than theirs, and this was their strength, for these sunny glossies of Italy beamingly scandalized the just and the unjust alike, churning up the splendour of their wickedness, weekly. The range of emotions was as grand as Grand Opera, but no subtler. A clandestine child, preferably a son, of a film star is discovered; or an opera singer tells of the persecution she currently endures at the hands of the tenor's wife (under the headline "Assunta is Jealous of Me"); divorce in a royal family is a standard thriller, or any story involving mother-love, especially when the theme turns on the sacrifice of a steady lover. Sheer villains, utter innocents - the world's most complicated celebrities have been cast anew in these simple roles. (p.23)

The exuberance of the writing here reflects the energy expended in reconstructing or fabricating stories about the glamorous, while the essential falseness of the process is also emphasized. The juxtaposition in 'beamingly scandalized' suggests that the dangerous power of their calumny is all the greater because of the apparent innocence and good nature of presentation. It is evident that Muriel Spark's own knowledge of Italian magazines is extensive; the stories about Claudia Cardinale which broke in 1967 exemplify many of the features described - the concealment of both an illegitimate son and a clandestine marriage, and the accusation of abandoning her son followed by the revelation that he had been brought up by her parents believing himself to be her brother[18]. One respect in which she faithfully represents the concerns of such magazines is in their emphasis on marriage and, more

covertly, sexuality. It is noticeable looking back to the 1960s that there was a strong desire to believe in celebrities as 'ideal' couples. Unfortunately for the stories, 'ideal' married couples kept on separating, as did Mel Ferrer and Audrey Hepburn in 1967[19], but as Muriel Spark indicates, a society enthralled by notions of romance and marriage is also enthralled by divorce. She satirizes the stereotypical stories manufactured to fulfil the desires of magazine readers, ludicrously conflating Frederick's family roles in, 'a *fatherly son* of *Mother* Earth, Annabel's *husband*' (p.27).

The novel mockingly deflates the importance attached to sex. Annabel tells Luigi, 'I don't like tiger-sex. I like to have my sexual life under the bedclothes, in the dark, on a Saturday night. With my nightdress on. I know it's kinky, but that's how I like it' (p.101). It is typical of Muriel Spark's wit to depict such sexual conduct, for long considered the acme of propriety, as 'kinky', thereby implying that in a sex-obsessed society normality consists, or rather is supposed to consist, in all manner of sexual experimentation. She endows Annabel's affairs with the banality of a domestic chore - 'She responded idly with two afternoons in bed with him, after which they got dressed and made the bed' (p.7). The unimportance of sexual intercourse is made bizarrely comic when Annabel says, 'just because I go to bed with a man isn't to say I'm going to rub shoulders with him' (p.82); the word 'rub' pointedly emphasizes a departure from the relative intimacy usually accorded different parts of the body. It also prompts thought about the expression 'to rub shoulders', reanimating it with a sense of the physical. Graham Lord reported in the *Sunday Express* that Muriel Spark had said of the Pope, 'He's a disaster. He's obsessed with sex'[20]; the refusal to treat sex as significant is consistent throughout her work. In *The*

Public Image she both acknowledges the prurient interest in the sex lives of others that is characteristic of contemporary journalism, and downgrades the importance of sexual acts in themselves.

What the novel shows as momentous is the struggle for control over one's own life and the lives of others, not sexuality. Teresa de Lauretis in her study of cinema, *Alice Doesn't*[21], considers the possibility that it is in the nature of narrative to enact power struggles. She quotes Laura Mulvey's observation:

> sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end[22],

and speculates about the validity of reversing her statement to say 'a story demands sadism'[23]. Her discussion centres on the desires motivating male narratives and so she advocates attempting alternative narratives which can allow women to escape from their role as objects in whom change is willed. However, if her argument is considered in relation to *The Public Image*, and sadism is defined as the attempt to impose one's will on another regardless of the other's wishes, it helps us to see that narrative suspense can be based on female desires. The suspense in this novel is sustained by doubt as to whether Frederick will succeed, even after his death, in destroying Annabel's career, or whether she will continue to triumph by retaining him as an adjunct to her image. Frederick's desire is not at first sight directed 'towards seducing women into femininity'[24], at least in the sense of sexual desire; he is portrayed as seeking revenge for the humiliation his wife's success has inflicted on him. The desired 'femininity' here could be seen as acceptance by Annabel of inferiority in intellectual prowess and in earning capacity, of her

submission to the role of 'ordinary' woman, private mother. The concept of a 'battle of will and strength' usefully draws attention to the narrative as a site of struggle. This dimension of the text is made clear when Annabel hears the letter left by Frederick; the text describes her as, 'fully strained towards the professional nature of the enemy, desiring only to know the full extent and scope of his potential force' (p.83). It is ironic that up to this point no character has overtly challenged Frederick's assumption of intellectual superiority, but Annabel's response, 'I didn't realize that he was dangerous' (p.85), reinforces the mocking deflation with which he has been presented. By making even Annabel show that she has never taken him seriously, but has tolerated his self-image as long as it did not conflict with her own, the novel strengthens the scornful treatment of claims not realized in action. It is only when he shows an understanding of the construction of public images and tries to use this knowledge to destroy Annabel's career that she perceives him as a powerful enemy rather than a stooge. This is reinforced by the humour of Billy's statement, 'He was thinking of his public image' (p.82).

The novel faithfully follows the convention that publicity does not depict the actual work of stars but concentrates instead on their conspicuous consumption. In less democratic Europe their 'ordinariness' may not be as essential as it is said to be in America, but here too a combination of the exotic and the familiar is seen to have great potency. The novel indicates how in Italy stereotypical English images, such as the afternoon tea ceremony at 'a low table set with a lace-edged tray' (p.27), can be made to appear glamorous. The construction of Annabel's Englishness as exotic is a reversal of the presentation of an Italian actress such as Sophia Loren in England in the 1960s. Her striking beauty epitomized the

English idea of the voluptuously sensual Italian woman; by contrast, magazines of the period carried many stories about her love for her extremely unglamorous, fat, elderly husband, implying that beneath the tiger image was a quiet, gentle housewife.

The same need to reconcile glamour with the quotidian can be seen in the way stories of royalty are presented. *Paris Match* in 1967 showed Princess Margaretta of Denmark cooking in the kitchen of her rural retreat, where, 'elle n'a que trois pieces et une cuisine: elle y prepare des mets qui sont, dit-on, les meilleurs du Danemark'[25]. The pleasure of reading such stories must derive from the satisfaction of being told that even a princess can have a private, domestic life recognizably like other people's, but the difference must not be eliminated altogether; if a princess stoops to do the cooking it has to be done with extraordinary skill, or so the loyal commoners are pleased to say. Roland Barthes comments in 'The "Blue Blood" Cruise' on the paradoxical message contained in depictions of royalty behaving like "ordinary" people:

> To flaunt the fact that kings are capable of prosaic actions is to recognize that this status is no more natural to them than angelism to common mortals, it is to acknowledge that the king is still king by divine right.[26]

His argument holds as long as royalty are accepted as different by nature from the rest of us, hence the reference to blood. Provided this is so, film stars through their "natural" sameness allow for more complete forms of identification by the public.

The importance of contrast goes beyond vicarious consumption and recognition of similarity in difference. As the characterization of Barbara Vaughan implies, the idea that there is more to a person than appears on the

surface is gratifying to the human desire for part of ourselves to be private and beyond criticism. But whereas in *The Mandelbaum Gate* Muriel Spark affirms the authenticity of the private self, in *The Public Image* she displays a fabricated contrast between surface propriety and hidden passion. She shows, too, that the notional private life of a star has to be as available as the supposedly public one. In the construction of stars' images it is not concealment itself that is drawn upon but the idea of concealment. In this way public images feed our hidden vanities by leaving nothing hidden, or at least by constructing both sides of the desired contrast; what is actually hidden by definition cannot be known. However, discordant information can emerge to disrupt the image, as when Rock Hudson was known to be dying of AIDS; this is acknowledged by Muriel Spark in making the story of Annabel hinge on the need for stars to adjust their fabrications to accommodate irrepressible revelations or to abandon them as irretrievably destroyed.

Her challenge to classic realism can be traced in another, moral, context. According to Robert Kiely, the development of the novel in the eighteenth century accompanied the construction of a certain kind of morality in which a particular view of the world was elevated into an idea of reality: 'institutions, the family, the parish, the profession, became symbols of order, stability, moral purpose - in fact of a whole concept of objective reality'[27]. Muriel Spark depicts all three institutions, but in this novel at least they are not 'symbols of order, stability, moral purpose'. Annabel's extremely small family is a site of conflict and power struggle, and her parish as represented by the neighbours does indeed provide strength and support but only in acting out a charade. Richard Schickel in a study of celebrities, *Common Fame*, argues that it is part of our understanding

of celebrities that they do not belong to any neighbourhood but form part only of 'the celebrity community'[28], hence the significance of the recurring motif of travel. In *The Public Image* the power of a community is depicted through Annabel's neighbours, but, in conformity with convention, she is presented as an outsider with no intimates among them. Like a good politician, however, she understands their desires and their collective force; after all, they are the people for whom her image is constructed.

The institution of Annabel's 'profession' is not so easily dismissable as a façade or sham. The analogy made between her devotion to her job and that of a doctor is developed fully, and comically:

> But she looked at her watch and said to the doctor, "It's just past two. I must say something to the press now, or it will be too late for the morning papers. Things like this are easily misconstrued, and I don't want the whole world to get the wrong story."
>
> "But you must sleep?" He seemed to be confused by this unaccustomed point of view in a patient, and began to flounder with his doctor's orders.
>
> "It's essential," she said, when he again spoke hesitantly. "You know, I have a public image to consider."
>
> He said, "You are very brave," confronted now with the image of another profession, and conscious of how a doctor is obliged to pull himself together when called upon, regardless of any personal stress he might be under.
>
> "Oh, one gets used to it," she said. "It's a habit." (p.61)

The value of choosing a doctor for this comparison is that the public image of the family practitioner is one of devotion to duty carrying with it general esteem and

status. The response of the doctor's wife reflects the obvious difference between the perceived importance and moral worth of the two callings:

> "You are different," she said. "A doctor is totally different. This is ridiculous, for an actress to think of the public when there is a private tragedy. You have to serve your patients, but she is not obliged in any way like that. ..." (p.63-64)

Her sentiments match the prevailing view of the importance of a doctor's role in preserving life and of the comparative triviality of providing pleasure through art, and most critics of the novel appear to agree, stressing as they do its satirical attitude to the film industry. However, Muriel Spark constructs her story so that it is not entirely 'ridiculous' for Annabel to 'think of the public', and the holding of a press conference is 'natural'. Even her so-called 'private tragedy' is more of a public event than a private one. The doctor's ready acceptance of 'the mystery of another profession', while it appears a comic response to the statement, 'I have a public image to consider', suggests that the analogy might not be merely ludicrous. Certainly Annabel's professional understanding and dedication are presented as powerful motivating forces. There is an implication that an actress does have responsibility towards all the people who derive pleasure from her work and that a major part of her work is producing her own image. Is the giving of pleasure to many people trivial and negligible? Through an apparently humorous comparison, Muriel Spark questions the moral status and responsibility accorded to different kinds of work and perhaps implies that the image of a doctor is as much a construct as any other.

Robert Kiely's argument is that the basis of moral judgement became increasingly secular and social during the period when the novel was developing. Annabel's

question, 'Good? What's good about not being bad?' (p.114) could be seen as a challenge to secularized morality with its emphasis on not doing harm to others. The question implies the possibility of another, more dynamic, concept of virtue. Muriel Spark shares with Alice Thomas Ellis a lofty disregard for a morality predicated on social behaviour[29]. The development of such a morality was aided by rejection of the doctrine of original sin in favour of a belief in natural good. Both these writers are pessimistic about human virtue and demonstrate their allegiance to the witty, the polished, the epigrammatic utterance. It is as though a belief in the natural tendency of humans to slide lazily into sin has to be countered by a strenuous attempt to make oneself better, and better has to be in the opposite direction from nature. Flamboyant dressing is seen as corrupt by those who equate what is most natural with what is most virtuous. Hence there is a connection between the religious convictions of these writers and their admiration of, and aspiration towards, the elegant and the sophisticated in dress and in words.

Religious belief also informs attitudes towards performance and public images. The concept of a private, authentic self as the only true basis for judgement has overtones of a Protestant belief in justification by faith. To challenge this concept and assert that judgement can be based only on performance, or that 'without "appearance" there can be no "reality"', corresponds with the older, Catholic belief in justification by works. It can also be seen as a challenge to the facile adherence to notions of 'authenticity' which played a prominent part in the culture of the 1960s. Elizabeth Wilson in *Adorned In Dreams* argues for connections between styles of dress and concepts of the self:

This division between the "authentic" and the "modernist" can be applied to many of the fashions I have discussed, and especially to contemporary counter-cultural fashions. The hippie, for example, would be "authentic", the punk, as I suggested, "modernist". The nineteenth century dress reformers were "authentic", but the dandies, like the courtesans of the French Second Empire, were "modernists" - preoccupied with the creation of an image, not the discovery of the "true" self.[30]

Her formulation indicates the applicability of the concept of the "dandy" to the work of these novelists. William McBrien's essay, 'The novelist as dandy', supports the idea that there is a religious significance in an allegiance to such stylishness:

> Beerbohm does not discuss "artifice" as a spiritual strategy, but we know from observing dandyism and particularly its manifestations in Wilde and the French Decadents that it traditionally had spiritual impulses, among them to affront puritans and materialists. Spark more than hints at this in attaching the term "parable" to fiction.[31]

The parallels between the writings of Muriel Spark and Alice Thomas Ellis are, therefore, not to be attributed to chance or the result of influence but to ways in which their shared religion leads to a sharing of other convictions through a pattern of interlocking attitudes.

When discussing the presentation of the family in the novel I neglected one of its most important aspects, one moreover which is essential to an understanding of the ending - Annabel as mother. The ironic tone which pervades the rest is absent from a passage describing the strength of her maternal feeling:

> The baby, Carl, was the only reality of her life. His existence gave her a sense of being permanently secured

to the world which she had not experienced since her own childhood had passed. She was so enamoured of the baby that she did not want to fuss over it with gurgles and baby-babble, as did the nurse and the secretaries who came from the studio. She felt a curious fear of display where the baby was concerned, as if this deep and complete satisfaction might be disfigured or melted away by some public image. (p.35)

The novel challenges sentimental constructions of motherhood drawn on by the Italian press, yet here apparently confirms mother-love as an actuality existing on a different level from those images which might threaten it. The change of level is clear in Annabel's unwillingness to 'gurgle', which marks her resistance to performing the role of an adoring mother. Whatever social constructions surround the idea of motherhood, the physical act of carrying a child and giving birth are undeniable. Teresa de Lauretis comments on its significance for sexual politics in her discussion of the Oedipus myth:

> And men will have to imagine other ways to deal with the fact that they, men, are born of women. For this is the ultimate purpose of the myth, according to Lévi-Strauss: to resolve that glaring contradiction and affirm, by the agency of narrative, the autochthonous origin of man.[32]

The novel allows no such resolution but affirms that the male child, Carl, is born of woman, and that such bodily events connot be refined out of existence through narrative. In *Feminine Fictions* Patricia Waugh argues that women writers have been less concerned with the postmodernist project and its challenge to existing models of coherence than with trying to establish an identity formerly denied them. In other words, decentring the self is premature for selves that have not yet been centred. She says of feminists:

What they have articulated instead is a core belief in a self which, although contradictory, non-unitary, and historically produced through "discursive" and ideological formations, nevertheless has a material existence and history in actual human relationships, beginning crucially with those between infants and caretakers at the start of life.[33]

It can be argued that *The Public Image* conforms to Patricia Waugh's analysis. Despite its deconstruction of traditional conceptions of the self, it finally endorses 'material existence and history' through its treatment of motherhood.

The ending, as so often in Muriel Spark's novels, opens out into possibilities not allowed for earlier in the text. Annabel and her baby are shown alone together waiting for a flight to Greece:

> Waiting for the order to board, she felt both free and unfree. The heavy weight of the bags was gone; she felt as if she was still, curiously, pregnant with the baby, but not pregnant in fact. She was pale as a shell. She did not wear her dark glasses. Nobody recognized her as she stood, having moved the baby to rest on her hip, conscious also of the baby in a sense weightlessly and perpetually within her, as an empty shell contains by its very structure, the echo and harking image of former and former seas. (p.124-125)

The repeated image of the shell is a reminder that the shape of a woman's body contains the possibility of bearing a child, and that after childbirth the echo of pregnancy remains. The shell image is used earlier in the letter addressed by Frederick to Annabel: 'You are a beautiful shell, like something washed up on the sea-shore, a collector's item, perfectly formed, a pearly shell - but empty, devoid of the life it once held' (p.92). Here the connotations of the shell are negative,

but in conjunction with the reference to Greece it serves as a reminder of other births, those of myth, and specifically of Aphrodite's birth from the sea. The endless recession of the final words extends the time-scale backwards to geological time and the origins of all life in shell-laden seas. The effect of these associations is to link Annabel, through the action of giving birth, into an endless pattern of birth and death. Her merging into the larger pattern of human destiny is reflected in her anonymity. Ironically it is made clear that sunglasses, which ostensibly serve to preserve anonymity, actually draw attention to the need for disguise and hence signal the presence of a celebrity, or of someone who wishes to be mistaken for a celebrity. It reinforces the notion that it is the image which is public and recognizable. Without publicity humans become indistinguishable from each other.

It is an unexpectedly affirmative ending. Initially Annabel is seen surrounding herself with newness, a new apartment, a new image. The irritant of Billy is important as it shows how old friends cannot easily be accommodated into a reconstructed life - 'Billy was like a worn-out something that one had bought years ago on the hire-purchase system, and was still paying up with no end to it in sight' (p.6). This marks the importance of the transition to evocations of the past. The choice of Greece is rich with resonances. In Britain now the dominant association may be with cheap, sunny, package holidays, but this was less so in 1968. The longstanding identification of Greece with the origin of European civilization is brought into play by images of seas and shells. In fleeing from Rome, Annabel is depicted as leaving behind the world of films, of media publicity, of parties, glamour, 'la dolce vita', and as moving towards something more elemental and enduring. The empty shell

could be seen as retaining the echo of Greek civilization and the unending pattern of life and death of which history reminds us. It is almost submerged by what is shallow and meretricious in modern life but nevertheless endures. Some critics have argued that at the end Annabel is allowed to find her 'true self' and rejoice in what they see as a reassertion of individualism. She seems rather to find history and to submerge herself in larger patterns than the immediate concerns of image preservation.

The concept of reality which emerges centres on the inescapability of physical events and on the patterns of history. Our knowledge of the past may be filtered through unreliable fictions, but nevertheless we remain linked to it through biological processes. The emphasis on actions, on doing, not just being, may be connected to the activity of writing; writers as well as actors have public images and are encouraged to appear, give interviews, be admired. However, the actual production of texts is a prime necessity and the novel implies that writers should expect to be judged not for their intentions, self-images or personalities, but for the achievement of artifice. Muriel Spark does not deny the existence of a private sphere and its importance to the individual; what she shows in this novel is its irrelevance to others. The authorial ambiguity and the challenge to conventional presentations of character, while they enable her to acknowledge the power of fiction-making, finally assert that the world does not consist solely of texts. It also consists of bodies; those of women can produce babies while men have to content themselves with myths like *Pygmalion*.

3.3 *THE HOTHOUSE BY THE EAST RIVER*

When reading *The Cloud of Unknowing* it is possible for a non-Christian to recognize as valid its insights into human nature. The text seems full of "common sense". A Christian might find in such shared recognitions confirmation of God's existence. Alternatively, a non-Christian could find in them confirmation of the invention of God in accordance with human needs. The second explanation indicates why it can be considered valid to refer to psychology when attempting to understand religious doctrines and the power of belief. It is therefore not surprising that texts of religion and of psychology should interpenetrate, as they do in *The Hothouse by the East River*. And it is not necessary to have "belief" in any branch of either system of ideas in order to find enlightening what has been said and written about both.

The connection between its treatment of psychology and religion is established early in the novel; this is done through a reference to *The Confessions* of St Augustine. At the same time the relevance of New York as a setting is made evident. The passage in question opens with an invocation of the city:

> New York, home of the vivisectors of the mind, and of the mentally vivisected still to be reassembled, of those who live intact, habitually wondering about their states of sanity, and home of those whose minds have been dead, bearing the scars of resurrection: New York heaves outside the consultant's office, agitating all around her about her ears. (p.11)

In the ensuing conversation between Elsa and the psychoanalyst, Garven, New York becomes comically confused with Carthage:

"I came to Carthage."

"Carthage?"

She says, "I could write a book."

"What do you mean by Carthage?" he says. "You say you came. You came, you say. Do you mean here is Carthage?" (p.11)

The intertextual reference which eludes Garvin is to Book 3 of St Augustine's *Confessions*: 'I went to Carthage, where I found myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust'[1]. By linking this text to psychoanalysis the novel draws attention to a similarity between the Christian practice of confession and the revelation of the past through the analytic process. In both cases past sins are, in theory, uncovered and purged, enabling the individual to achieve spiritual, or psychic, health.

But the novel does not depict psychoanalysis with the optimism this might suggest. The word 'vivisector' implies that the mental probing entailed, at least in the methods practised in New York, is damagingly intrusive and destructive. Its setting draws on the stereotypical image of New York as a place where it is fashionable to have an analyst and not having one is popularly conceived as an indication of poverty. It also draws on images of frenzied lifestyles and excessive sexual licence. The novel paraphrases the words of St Augustine: 'She says, "I came to Carthage where there bubbled around me in my ears a cauldron of unholy loves"' (p.12), identifying the New York which 'heaves' and is 'agitating' as the modern day equivalent of Carthage. It is a place where minds as well as bodies are said to be out of control and where 'vivisectors' prey on the minds of others for profit alongside those who prey on bodies. St Augustine's image of the heat associated with lustful desires is transposed into the heat of the city in summer:

> "...Today's been the hottest on record for twelve years. Tomorrow is to be worse. People are going mad in the streets. People coming home, men coming home, will have riots in their hearts and heads, never mind riots in the streets." (p.10)

The heat of the weather is traditionally thought to provoke the metaphorical "heat" of anger which in turn generates the "heat" of rioting. New York's climatic extremes are thus added to the other stereotypical images of excess with which the city is associated.

St Augustine's 'cauldron' is, more humorously, translated into the 'hot house' inhabited by Elsa and Paul. In summer their apartment is described as filled with the noise of air conditioners, but most of the action of the novel takes place in winter when its ancient heating system cannot be adjusted. It is generally accepted by critics that the 'hothouse' of the title refers to purgatory; Norman Page asserts without question or explanation, 'the "hothouse" of an overheated apartment in a highrise block in winter is actually Purgatory'[2]. However the botanical associations are also worth considering. Throughout the novel the significance of things left unsaid is emphasized and this, together with the repetitious banality of life in the heated apartment, constructs a sense of expectation as though awaiting the forced growth of some kind of recognition or understanding. And Paul says of Elsa, 'She likes the heat in winter' (p.87); the association of Elsa with a plant that belongs naturally in a warmer climate is supported by the knowledge, acquired later by the reader, that she is dead and so belongs somewhere other than in a New York apartment. The link with heat is reinforced by the colour of her clothes: 'She is wearing a flame-coloured crepe evening dress...' (p.83); 'She is wearing her new red dress...' (p.119). The word 'flame' brings out the connection with fire, thereby supporting the claim

that the heat in the apartment connotes the fires of purgatory.

The identification of New York with an image of purgatory suggests the concepts of suffering and expiation. But the satirical representation of the city is full of humour. The treatment of the idea that it is a place of social problems is farcical rather than solemn; the list of 'problems' enumerated by the psychiatrist, Annie Armitage, becomes increasingly ludicrous. It jumbles together items from different categories, including some which most people would consider serious alongside others which are inventions parodying fashionable concerns - 'the physiopsychodynamics problem', 'the anthro-egalitarian problem' (p.108) - rendering the whole list absurd. The cumulative impact of its bizarre juxtapositions and excessive length is to suggest that much professed concern is not only spurious but may be pleasurably self-congratulatory. By undermining Annie's point of view it invites the reader to consider whether the fuss about a shadow is as frivolous as she maintains: '"The hell with her shadow," says Annie. "Haven't we got enough serious problems in this city?..."' (p.108). The conclusion could be that focusing on civic problems is a way of avoiding more serious questions about spiritual matters. Since concern with the individual psyche is often compared unfavourably with concern for the social good, this represents a challenge to certain definitions of the 'serious'.

The statement which interrupts Annie's diatribe underlines the absurdity of the novel's depiction of the city: '"Down there, outside the United Nations," Elsa says, "there are three policemen demonstrating in the nude, except for their caps - that's to show they're policemen..." (p.109). At the time when this was written some American novelists,

notably Thomas Pynchon[3], had resorted to modes of farcical excess and surrealism in their writing as the only adequate way to deal with their perception of the grotesque distortions of contemporary life. *The Hothouse by the East River* can thus be seen as "American" not only in its setting but in its comic mode. In 'The Desegregation of Art', a paper delivered to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1971, Muriel Spark said:

> ...the only effective art of our particular time is the satirical, the harsh and witty, the ironic and derisive. Because we have come to a moment in history when we are surrounded on all sides and oppressed by the absurd.[4]

Her satirical mockery of New York in the novel is extended through the names she gives to its nightclubs and discotheques: 'The Personality Cult' (p.122), 'The Sensual Experience' (p.133), 'Arthur's' (p.135) and 'The Throb' (p.135). They represent a desire for heterogeneous experiences and for sensations, mixing mythological mystifications ('Arthur's') with the cult of the individual, of 'personality' and 'personalities'.

The satire on the cult of psychoanalysis is reinforced by the ineffectiveness of its proponents, Garven and Annie. In the exchanges between Elsa and Garven conventional roles and power relations are reversed. His ignorance of the source of her quotations cedes the power of knowledge and interpretation to Elsa. Her control is insisted on: 'Arriving home she says, "I managed to rattle Garven again today"' (p.12). The text ridicules the pride of the "professional" psychoanalysts, depicting as complacent and fatuous the claims made about their techniques and 'specialisms':

> He looks across from his armchair to hers (for he does not believe in the couch; to relinquish it had been his first speciality) .... His claim is, "I get my patients

> right away on to a first-name basis'; it is the second on his list of specialities. (p.11)

There is another long, jargon-ridden list, this time detailing the fabricated disorders which may be treated by Annie's 'new method' (p.129), including 'a hyper-introspective bladder complicated by euphoria of the liver' (p.130). Once again the listing manifests a delight in piling up farcical examples. There is a progressive build up of absurdity during the novel, and the claims made here are the culmination of a series of increasingly ludicrous statements about psychoanalytic method.

However, a passage which contrasts Europe with New York suggests that it is the faddishness of New York psychoanalytic practices rather than psychoanalysis in its entirety that is being satirized. Often in Muriel Spark's spare, witty prose isolated passages stand out from the rest because of their unexpected lyricism. As in this case, they create greater intensity of emotion:

> Paul looks down on to the dark and quite dangerous street. "Help me!" cries his mind, with a fear reaching back to the Balkan realities. He looks round the room, panicking for her familiar shadow. He wants her back from that wild Europe, those black forests and gunmetal mountains. Come back to Manhattan the mental clinic, cries his heart, where we analyse and dope the savageries of existence. Come back, it's very centrally heated here, there are shops on the ground floor, you can get anything here that you can get over there and better, money's no object. Why go back all that way where your soul has to fend for itself and you think for yourself in secret while you conform with the others in the open? Come back here to New York the sedative chamber where you don't think at all and you can act as crazily as you like and talk your head off all day, all night. (p.75-76)

The implication is that the difference between the two places is not one of sanity versus madness but of the concealment or exposure of the madness within everyone. Although the passage is overtly an argument in favour of openly displayed craziness, its rhetoric favours the privacy of the soul fending for itself. 'Wild' Europe, with its 'black forests and gunmetal mountains' carries a Romantic charge lacking in the 'centrally heated', 'sedative chamber' of New York. The anti-climax of 'He ... reflects that after all she isn't in any wild place but in a first-class hotel in Zürich' (P.76) is not just comic; it reinforces the idea that the 'wildness' of Europe is a mental construct, imaging a state of mind rather than an actual place.

Muriel Spark's early critical work employs psychoanalytic theory with surprisingly little hesitation. She said of Wordsworth:

> From the evidence of experimental psychology, it would appear more likely that Wordsworth, as belonging to the species of the artist, should react, on the whole, to emotional stimuli of a physical, erotic and subjective nature.[5]

She is uninhibited in her linking of biography and literary criticism; in her study of Mary Shelley she claims, 'Throughout this book, I have tried to define the sources of conflict as they transmit themselves from Mary's life and work'[6], and indeed her analysis does link the 'life' to the 'work' giving psychological explanations for features of the writing. Her commitment to such explanations was emphatically asserted in one of her *Poetry Review* editorials:

> Psychologists have shown how the world of dream and fantasy bears a direct relationship to art; archetypal images, planetary shapes and all the experiences to which mankind is subject are inherent in the

> unconscious mind of the human race, and the poet, having by his very nature especial access to the rich race memory, may now identify his experience, not only with external symbols but with the infinitely more significant and accurate imagery of the psyche.[7]

Her romanticizing of the special powers of the artist is only slightly modified by an admission of the reader to the ranks of the informed: 'As for the poet, so for the reader; the fuller interpretation of unconscious into conscious thought is becoming more widely apprehended'[8]. The terminology makes clear that the kind of psychological explanation she favours is Jungian. That her interest in Jung's theories was sustained is reflected by her concern with his observations on *The Book of Job* and also by her own subsequent analysis; according to Ruth Whittaker, 'after her conversion she underwent Jungian therapy for six months at the hands of a priest'[9]. A Jungian approach to literary criticism was more fashionable during the period of Muriel Spark's critical writing and conversion than it was at the time when she was working on *The Hothouse by the East River*, and the validity of biographical explanations of literary texts was also less debatable then than it has since become. It would clearly be unwise to use a biographical method in this instance and argue that Muriel Spark's views stated in 1948 can explain a novel published in 1973. Nevertheless, the novel's use of psychoanalytic concepts and its satire on the more absurd excesses of jargon and practice are compatible with the serious interest in the subject manifested elsewhere in Muriel Spark's 'life and work'.

One of the claims made by the psychoanalysts could be taken as a comment on the method used in the novel itself - 'It's the secondary associative process of the oblique approach' (p.129). It is one of Muriel Spark's most perplexing narratives and can certainly be said to use an

'oblique approach'. The text evinces a playful delight in teasing the reader with enigmas, such as the mystery of Elsa's shadow, and resolution of the enigmas is assisted by an 'associative process'. The comparability of attempts by the reader and by the analyst to arrive at solutions indicates that some of the comments made in the text may be applied to both. Elsa says of Garven, 'The problem of me is his, not mine' (p.16), and also, 'He's looking for a cause and all I'm giving him are effects. It's lovely' (p.48). The 'problem' of unravelling meaning from the narrative is certainly not the character's, and the reader's effort to search for causes is perplexed by a superabundance of effects. In both cases what is challenged is the desire to dominate through the power of explanation. But the existence of enigmas to be resolved is in itself a source of pleasure.

Christine Brooke-Rose in her account of the 'encoded reader' (which is based on Roland Barthes's formulation of five codes in *S/Z*) emphasizes the importance of enigmas. She argues that literary texts need to achieve a balance between 'over-determination' and 'under-determination' and says, 'some under-determination is necessary for it to retain its hold over us, its peculiar mixture of recognition-pleasure and mystery'[10]. The combination of the two is linked in her subsequent assertion that 'the desire to know' is 'the very structure of desire, which is at the basis of all narrative'[11]. By first establishing 'mystery', and then providing clues to its resolution, narrative constructs forms which promote as well as gratify desire. It has become a commonplace of narrative theory to connect the 'recognition-pleasure' afforded by a literary text to that afforded by analysis of one's own past. Teresa de Lauretis explores this territory in *Alice Doesn't*, where she writes:

All narrative, in its movement forward toward resolution and backward to an initial moment, a paradise lost, is overlaid with what has been called an Oedipal logic - the inner necessity or drive of the drama - its "sense of an ending" inseparable from the memory of loss and the recapturing of time.[12]

Making psychoanalysis a narrative theme could therefore be seen as a means of signposting what is inevitably a part of the reading process.

Elizabeth Wright's account of developments in the understanding of relations between psychoanalysis and literary criticism usefully explores the issue of the control of interpretation. She argues:

> The psychoanalytic and the aesthetic process overlap because in each case the rhetorical leads to a negotiation in which reference and representation can be partially achieved, subject to ever new agreements. To assess the persuasive force of a text is to discover in what way writer, reader and critic, and the analyst, analysand and society, can enter into transforming relationships that are integral to structures of desire, relationships all of them have a measure of freedom to create.[13]

Given the instability of texts, she denies power to any one of the participants. This is in accord with the currently accepted principle that in psychoanalysis the analyst should not give a definitive explanation of material presented by the analysand but should suggest possible interpretations. It also corresponds to the idea that criticism should not aim to assert control over the text by offering definitive readings.

Puns and word-plays, considered not only witty but a crucial aid to understanding the workings of the unconscious, are abundant in this novel. Among the key

ideas introduced through the first exchange between Elsa and Garven is the importance given to language:

> "I'm all right, Garven," she says again while he is still wending his way towards Carthage.
>
> "Yes, I hope so. But we've got a good bit of ground to cover yet, Elsa, you know."
>
> She says, as if to irritate him, "Why do you say 'cover'? Isn't that a peculiar word for you to use? I thought psychiatry was meant to uncover something. But you say 'cover'. You said 'We've got a good bit of ground to cover' - "
>
> "I know, I know." He places his hands out before him, palms downward to hush her up. He then explains the meaning of "cover up" in its current social usage; he explains bitterly with extreme care. (p.11-12)

Humour results from the slippage between metaphorical and literal usage, as well as from the ridiculing of Garven. The dialogue also invites consideration of the possibility that psychoanalysis is a process of concealment, not just of revelation. The plot device of confronting an analyst with a symptom - Elsa's shadow - which cannot be accommodated within his system of ideas, exposes the limits of the explanatory power of such a system. It suggests that where explanation fails, denial follows - Garven at first cannot 'see' the shadow - and hence 'covering' rather than 'uncovering' occurs.

The attention paid to language insists that every nuance carries a precise significance. It teases the reader by suggesting that even the apparently inconsequential may be loaded with meaning. In this it could be a temptation to over-interpretation. The repeated motif of trying on shoes is a case in point. It recurs so often that the reader is bound to consider the possible relevance of associations with well known stories such as *Cinderella*, or *Snow White*.

It is possible that the following dialogue constitutes a comment on this effort by the reader:

> "...She sat there calmly and told me, as if it were something as meaningless as a pair of shoes."
>
> "Shoes have meaning, Father."
>
> Paul wants to hit his son, and scream at him that his rotten education has made him unfit for the modern world... .(p.19)

The reader may also want to scream at the possiblity of being the butt of, rather than a participant in, the joke. The psychic significance of jokes, explored by Freud in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, is considered in the context of literary criticism by Elizabeth Wright; she links the ambiguity of their interpretation to relations of power:

> The joke - and the aesthetic text - offer a site for negotiation, but this negotiation involves not only two participants, but their relation to language and power. Aesthetic response is the joint and agreed release or maintenance of repression. While there is a risk involved (as to who will have the last laugh), neither author, nor text, nor critic can reign supreme. Which way the laughter is to go will depend on the individuals and societies concerned....[14]

The joke in the novel refers to issues of interpretation outside the text, implicating the situation of the reader as well as psychoanalytic method; in both cases there may be ambiguity about who has the last laugh. If the reader feels uncertainty about whether what is at stake is the unravelling of a mystery or mystification, the doubt entails a diminished sense of power.

Psychological theories are also explored in the novel through its construction of character. Paul is depicted as suffering from paranoid delusions; characteristically, his terror is shown to increase as the threat he perceives

becomes more vague and non-specific: 'Helmut Kiel is a definite danger to his life, but preferable to the torture of that something of Elsa's out there on the river' (p.17). As the novel progresses his sources of fear grow in number: '"Garven," says Paul, "is a dangerous man. He's been shadowing[15] me"' (p.104). Both Paul and Garven project their feelings onto others. Garven is the one who screams at the sight of worms 'wriggling upon Princess Xavier's breast' (p.45) and yet afterwards he keeps on telling the others, 'Don't panic'. The suspicious jealousy Paul manifests in relation to Helmut Kiel and Elsa is eventually revealed as a projection of his own attraction towards Kiel:

> I will probably never know exactly what Kiel was to her, she will always wonder if Kiel was anything to me. After all this questioning, one's denials and protestations would be slavish. Kiel has talked; God knows what he's said about us. (p.117)

The details of behaviour presented during the text are ultimately given a different frame of reference through the indication that the whole edifice is to be seen as emanating from Paul's imagination. This provides, retrospectively, a humorous double inflection to several incidents and statements: 'He thinks, she has become a mocker, she wasn't always like this. It's I who have made her so' (p.8); 'If Paul could be induced to believe this man's somebody else, then he will become somebody else' (p.38). But Paul complains that he cannot control events - 'They have taken control, he thinks. I didn't mean it this way' (p.112) - and this can be read as a comment on the difficulty of imposing limits on one's own imagination. There is a contrast between the fabulous wealth attributed to Elsa and the statement:

> She brings with her scraps of her life in a family of poor relations in a semi-detached house in Sevenoaks, a

> tumble-down education at a boarding school where she played lacrosse and the piano. (p.57)

At the end of the novel she says, 'I never had any money in my life. It's all a myth' (p.137). Her transformation into a wealthy, jet-setting woman evidently refers to the pleasure of imagining ourselves participating in exotic and glamorous lifestyles, and the transformation is presumably to be read as another emanation from the mind of Paul.

It is possible to read the novel as a depiction of the effect of jealousy. In this respect there are significant parallels with some of the work of Alain Robbe-Grillet, who has already been referred to as a writer Muriel Spark considers noteworthy. His novel *La Jalousie*, published in 1957, can be understood as a representation of a husband's obsession with the idea of his wife's infidelity. But he is even less willing than Muriel Spark to construct thought processes for his characters. He indicates mental operations through describing objects and events while marking no clear boundary between those which exist in the diegetic present, those which are recalled through memory, and those which are fantasized. John Ward's account of his procedures makes some observations which could also be applied to *The Hothouse by the East River*:

> He is concerned with what is seen, with the physical world and only that. What most critics have failed to realise is that he does not reject character, psychology and emotion any more than traditional novelists have done: the thesis of *chosisme* merely entails that those conceptions must be described by means other than introspection, direct description or stream of consciousness, which are all unreliable techniques because they cannot be checked and because they separate the reader from the novels. Character and so on must be created indirectly, through perception.

> *L'école du regard* does not refer to an ontological belief but to a theory of novelistic technique.[10]

The theory that to make reading more akin to extra-textual ways of knowing is to counter the 'separation' of 'the reader from the novels' denies the peculiar pleasure that comes from having access to more information in fiction than is available in life. In her narrative technique Muriel Spark is kinder to the reader than Alain Robbe-Grillet; she relies more than he does on dialogue, and her handling of chronology is, on the surface at least, more straightforward. Although she depicts the jealous husband's absorption in past events, in her text this is not done through remorseless repetition of descriptions. Nevertheless, she too does not indulge the desire for readerly omniscience and, while not eliminating 'character, psychology and emotion', she also relies for their construction on means other than 'introspection, direct description or stream of consciousness'. There is one point on which I would take issue with John Ward; it does not seem valid to separate 'novelistic technique' from 'ontological belief', even in the restricted context of his argument, and indeed Robbe-Grillet in his own theoretical essays argues for their interrelation.

In the work of both writers an exploration of jealousy is linked to the treatment of time. The concept of time is the main subject of John Ward's study, which deals with the impact of Henri Bergson's theories about time and memory on the films of Alain Resnais. This leads him to discuss the extent to which Robbe-Grillet's ideas are compatible with Bergson's. He sees the 1961 film *L'Année Dernière à Marienbad*, for which Robbe-Grillet wrote the script, as a representation of the hero's obsession with events which occurred a year before the filmic present. The connection he makes with Bergson's theories leads him to distinguish between a fixation on past events which

prevents the individual from living fully in the present and an acceptance of the past which allows for onward movement into the future. The discontinuity which results from living in the past is said by John Ward to be linked to Bergson's conception of the intellect, which he describes as:

> the faculty which is the source of all man's psychological and social problems, precisely because it fragments his emotional life, separates his past, present and future, and by treating him as a physical object convinces him that he is not free.
>
> Opposed to matter is *life*, the vital force, which surges upwards to break free of matter, as a continuous process of becoming in time.[17]

These comments, despite their dubious separations, contain an argument which is pertinent to the presentation of Paul's predicament in *The Hothouse by the East River*. The continual references to events which supposedly occurred many years before suggests a fixation with the past. This is linked to the representation of Paul's denial of the most crucial event, his own death. The action of the novel indicates that it is only when Paul accepts that he too was killed in the war that he is able to re-enter the flow of time and escape from the impasse of the New York apartment.

One of the writers most strongly associated with Bergson is Proust. His concern with involutary memory is shared by, if not derived from, Bergson[18], and is connected to the notion of 'duration', which John Ward explains thus:

> Through involuntary memory, the past is brought into the present and the passage of clock time is suspended in an awareness of the duration of inner psychological time.[19]

A la Recherche du Temps Perdu depicts the recovery in the present of moments from the past through the operation of involuntary memory, most famously in the description of the eating of the madeleine. Involuntary memory is triggered by sensation rather than will, hence the notion that it is more productive of psychic wholeness than is the intellect. Muriel Spark's admiration for Proust's work has already been mentioned; in her article 'The Religion of an Agnostic' she quotes Proust's, 'Time as it flows, is so much time wasted and nothing can ever be truly possessed save under that aspect of eternity which is also the aspect of art'[20]. Her selection of this quotation places emphasis on the power of art to arrest an otherwise meaningless flow of time rather than on the creation of an unbroken continuum. The connection forged in his work which she most admires is that between mind (or spirit) and matter, and she links this to the concept of time through his art's redemption of what would otherwise be merely transitory. The two aspects of time come together in that the recovery of the past *in* his work reflects the redemption of the past *by* that work. It is worth noting that Muriel Spark in her article also refers to Proust as 'the insufferable hot-house plant'[21]; the connection here may be coincidental, but on the other hand it indicates a link in her mind between 'hothouses' and remembering the past. However, inside the hothouse one is sealed off from the present, as Proust was in his cork-lined room; the rescuing of the past is associated with spiritual health only if it promotes engagement with the present.

Time and the subjective experience of duration are insisted on in *The Hothouse by the East River*. When Elsa is in Zürich, Paul's anxiety leads to a series of telephone calls and throughout the episode time differences and the passage of time recur as a leitmotif.

The sensation of the slowness of time during periods of waiting is evoked through an image:

> ...He has been advised of an hour's delay and only a three-quarters of the hour has materialized. The hand that marks the seconds on his watch looks as if it is knitting a sock stitch by stitch. (p.76)

By contrast, a more objective construction of time, one that according to Bergson confuses time and space by attempting to divide duration into equal divisions, is represented by an official clock: 'There is a large round government clock stuck up on the wall, its size hideously magnifying the importance of working hours and seconds' (p.60). The clarity of time in the Ministry of Defence contrasts with its confusion in the hothouse:

> He cannot remember exactly what day it was that, on returning to the flat at seven in the evening - or six...if he could remember the season of the year...
>
> In the evening - he cannot exactly remember the day, the time of day, perhaps it was spring, or winter, perhaps it was five, six o'clock... (p.14)

As the novel progresses it becomes increasingly explicit that there is a disturbance, or block, in the normal sequence of time. Eventually Paul is shown thinking, 'One should live first, then die, not die then live; everything in its own time' (p.119). This echoes Elsa's, 'There's a time for everything' (p.21), and both recall *Ecclesiastes*:

> To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:
>
> A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted....[22]

The biblical reference underlines the contrast between time which progresses - Bergson's 'duration' - and time which is disrupted through obsessional return to certain key events of the past. The refusal to accept the passage

of time at an individual level is coupled with the disturbance of "natural" progression.

The disruption of time in the novel is emphasized in a more humorous vein by allusions to *Peter Pan*. The performance of the play by a geriatric cast is a central episode, and it is typical of Muriel Spark's writing that a major intertext should be so well known. Another reason for its choice is indicated:

> "*Peter Pan* is a very obscene play. Our presentation will only help to direct attention to that fact," says Pierre, looking cornerwise at his father. "Our talent will reveal the absurdity of the thing. The show will be a success, a big success." (p.63)

The use of a geriatric cast reinforces the resistance to normal processes of aging that is the most significant attribute of Peter Pan. It represents another form of resistance to 'duration' and of obsessive clinging to the past, to one's own youth. Jacqueline Rose, in her intriguing study *The Case of Peter Pan or the Impossibility of Children's Literature*, asserts a connection between conceptions of the child and processes of literary criticism:

> It seems to me that it is no coincidence that symbolism and biography are the two forms of "Freudian" analysis which are most commonly associated with children's fiction. ...Both presuppose a pure point of origin lurking behind the text which we, as adults and critics, can trace. This is, of course, the ultimate fantasy of much literary criticism which tries to uncover the true and primary meaning of a work. But in the analysis of children's fiction, the child seems to become implicated in the process. It is as if the child serves to sanction that concept of a pure origin because the child is seen as just such an origin in itself.[23]

According to this theory, the novel's condemnation of *Peter Pan* as 'obscene' is consistent both with its repudiation of Rousseauesque privileging of the natural and with its rejection of realism. The elaborate clothing worn by Elsa and Poppy for the performance of the play is akin to the metafictional self-consciousness of the text; both resist the myths of "naturalness" and of return to origins. The notion of a geriatric cast for *Peter Pan* emphasizes the play's cult of the child and its setting in New York makes a comment on the American obsession with youthfulness.

The use of the play as an intertext contributes to the novel's treatment of psychoanalysis. This is signposted by Garven's statement, 'Peter Pan's a deeply relevant psychological problem' (p.92). His reaction to the performance is contrasted with Elsa's:

> The scene is the traditional Never-Never Land, the island of Lost Boys. Garven breathes heavily with psychological excitement as Lost Boys of advanced age prance in fugitive capers with the provocative pirates, then hover over the crone Wendy. Enter, Peter Pan. At this point Elsa stands up and starts throwing squelchy tomatoes one after the other at the actors. (p.92)

The association of heavy breathing with psychoanalysis attacks the idea of professional detachment, implying a voyeuristic pleasure in observing the search by others for their 'origins'. The word 'provocative' is not only absurd when applied to 'pirates', it underscores the sexual connotations of Garven's excitement. Elsa's attack, on the other hand, is consistent with an acceptance of aging and dying as well as with the *Book of Ecclesiastes*. The carrying of the tomatoes in a 'big crocodile bag' (p.92-93) is a comic reminder of the crocodile which devours Captain Hook. It forges another link with the theme of time, for it is only when the clock which it has swallowed

runs down and stops ticking that the crocodile is able to catch Hook unawares. This could be seen as figuring a transition from clock time, which is here both mechanical and blocked, to subjective time; in both texts the shift to 'duration' releases the flow of time and leads to death. This reading of *Peter Pan* may appear far-fetched, and would probably surprise J.M.Barrie, but it indicates the way in which the novel invites reconsideration of the play through variations on its themes.

The motif of the shadow, so important in *The Hothouse by the East River*, also features in *Peter Pan*. In the prose version of the story, *Peter and Wendy*, the two principal characters first meet when Peter is sitting on the floor of the nursery trying to stick his shadow back on. This shadow is variously described as 'so like the washing'[24] when it is hung out of the window, as 'so draggled'[25] when it is on the floor, and as 'still a little creased'[26] after Wendy has sewn it back onto Peter. There is an echo of these descriptions in *The Hothouse by the East River*:

> The Princess waddles respectfully round Elsa's shadow to avoid treading on it as it falls across the grand piano and on to the floor like a webby grey cashmere shawl that has been left to trail and gather dust untouched for a hundred years. (p.34)

> She leaves the room, trailing her shadow at the wrong angle, like the train of an antique ball-dress. (p.36)

> "Yes," she says, throwing her coat on the bed while her shadow, regardless of the morning sunlight in front of her, makes the same gesture, hanging a moment from her raised arm like a raglan sleeve. Dust motes dance in the light and her shadow falls at a different tangent across the bed like the flung coat. (p.79)

The metaphors in the novel at first endow the shadow with a faded splendour. As the text progresses it becomes less ancient and 'webby'; its materiality increases until it is said to fall 'blackly' (p.105). It functions as an enigma which forces itself on the reader ever more insistently so that its significance has to be questioned. The parallel with *Peter and Wendy* also raises questions about whether the idea of the independent, separable existence of a shadow is anything more than whimsical playfulness[27]. The eternal childhood of Peter, as well as his fictionality, denies the possibility of death, and his separation from his shadow parallels his separation from time. For Elsa time is not absent, but it is at the 'wrong angle'.

In both texts the concept of time is linked to the motif of windows as well as to shadows. Allan Massie sees a connection between the window in *The Hothouse by the East River* and the idea of the dandy:

> So Elsa, who, in *The Hothouse by the East River*, sits at her window with her shadow falling the wrong way, is a dandy creation and an expression of the dandy insistence that life itself can be transformed into art by an exercise of the will. She relates directly to Max Beerbohm's perception of Brummell (also throned in a window) who tried to detach himself from the living of life and enter into artifice.[28]

While the emphasis on artifice rather than nature seems apt, the attempt at a total explanation ignores certain features of the motif. In *Peter Pan* flying out through the window represents escape to a timeless place, but it is important to the Darling children that the window remain open so that return is possible. The return is to the mother and domestic love, but also to the flow of time. The situation is reversed in *The Hothouse by the East River*; while the place outside the window again represents freedom, in this instance it is the freedom of time and

death. 'Never-Never Land' is situated inside the apartment and inside the stalled time of the narrative:

> Paul looks at the two young men and his thoughts turn panicky: "This has all happened a long time ago," he thinks. "What is now? Now is never, never. Only then exists....(p.51)

J.M.Barrie called the chapter in which Peter Pan entices the Darling children out of the nursery window 'Come Away! Come Away!'[29] There is an evident intertextual reference to Shakespeare's:

> Come away, come away, death,
>
> And in sad cypress let me be laid;
>
> Fly away, fly away, breath:
>
> I am slain by a fair cruel maid.[30]

However, the only apparent purpose served by this reference is to indicate Barrie's erudition, addressed to an adult rather than a child audience. The novel echoes the same words to more effect: '"Come away," Paul says to his wife. "Come away, love, they're all dead"' (p.120). Like Peter Pan, Paul is ostensibly enticing the other away from death, but as the reader knows by this point in the novel that Elsa is dead already, his words appropriately recall the willing embrace of death in Shakespeare's song.

A final key to the resolution of the enigma of Elsa's peculiar shadow is provided by the closing words of the text: 'she turns to the car, he following her, watching as she moves how she trails her ~~her~~ faithful and lithe cloud of unknowing across the pavement' (p.140). Here, as in *The Mandelbaum Gate*, the intertextual reference to the fourteenth-century English mystic's *The Cloud of Unknowing* makes a significant contribution to the meaning constructed by the text. Once a connection is forged between Elsa's shadow and the cloud, it becomes possible to read it as an image of the barrier between human reason and the divine. There is some ambiguity about the way her

shadow falls. Early on she is repeatedly described sitting in the east window in the evening with her shadow falling towards the west. One such description suggests a permanent light source in the east:

> The day is getting darker. He switches on the floor lamp, although the room is still light enough.
>
> Her shadow does not move. He comes and stands beside her, looking out. There is no beam of light coming in from the East River or the sky. But she goes on looking and receiving; perhaps she's begun to smile. (p.15)

The orientation towards the Holy Land implies a divine origin for the light which casts the shadow, and this is reinforced by the suggestion of beatitude in the word 'smile'. Elsewhere Elsa's shadow is described as falling consistently towards all sources of light, whether natural or artificial. The implication, however, remains the same, representing the turning of the spirit towards God, or the source of metaphorical light, rather than away.

John Glavin considers *The Hothouse by the East River* to be 'Spark's masterfiction'[31] and *The Cloud of Unknowing* to be its major intertext. In his discussion of the novel he makes a connection between unknowing and deconstruction:

> Working itself out in fiction, this *unknowing* requires not the affirmations of apologetic fictions ... but the deconstruction of both affirming and denying, the unhappy mechanisms of closure, including the affirmations and denials of those gifted with and/or burdened by the "Faith".[32]

This intriguingly links the concept of God as unknowable because human reason cannot comprehend the ineffable with the problem of knowing anything if meaning is endlessly deferred. The ineffable may be considered a condition of language, giving a different construction to the idea of God as "the word". John Glavin pursues his discussion of deconstruction into the domain of sexual politics:

The analyst's megalomania, the policeman's sadism, the husband's jealousy: each manifests that deployment of binary opposition fundamental to *knowing*. Garven's manipulation of sick/well echoes in the interrogator's various deployments of closed (true)/open (false), and in Paul's desperate attempt to associate himself with the privileged side of the real versus the imaginary. ...These artificial, power-seeking oppositions Deconstruction labels phallocentric. Muriel Spark prefers to see them as manifestations of *necromancy*, that ancient, black and essentially male magic which is for her the prime mover in the power politics of *knowing*.[33]

To support his final claim he draws on a conversation with the writer which took place in Arezzo. But her novels do not assert that everything is open and unknowable; as we have seen, *The Mandelbaum Gate* is concerned with scrupulous distinctions, but these distinctions themselves deconstruct the cultural codes which underpin power politics. In both novels the importance of recognizing the limitations of the human capacity to know is specifically related to God, hidden behind the 'cloud of unknowing'. The argument that 'knowing' is linked to masculinity and the desire for power gains only qualified support in Muriel Spark's fiction; while female characters such as Elsa and Barbara are endowed with a capacity for 'unknowing', not all the male characters are as fearful of this condition as Paul and Garven.

Paul's fear is evoked through recurrent images of live burial which reinforce the concept of entrapment. His 'tell-tale heart'[34] is repeatedly referred to:

> His heart thumps for help. "Help me! Help me!" cries his heart, battering the sides of the coffin. (p.15)

> How long, cries Paul in his heart, will these people, this city, haunt me? (p.88)
>
> His heart knocks on the sides of the coffin. "let me out!" (p.127)

The images provide the reader with clues as to the condition of the characters; eventually this is presented less equivocally:

> "Go back, go back to the grave," says Paul, "from where I called you."
>
> "It's too late," Elsa says. "It was you with your terrible and jealous dreams who set the whole edifice soaring." (p.95)

The link between Paul's imaginings and an 'edifice' culminates in:

> They stand outside their apartment block, looking at the scaffolding. The upper stories are already gone and the lower part is a shell. A demolition truck waits for the new day's shift to begin. The morning breeze from the East River is already spreading the dust.
>
> Elsa stands in the morning light reading the billboard. It announces the new block of apartments to be built on the old.
>
> "Now we can have some peace," says Elsa. (p.139-140)

The instant demolition, incompatible with realism, makes sense only on a reading of the building as a mental construct. Paul is depicted as trapped by contradictory desires; the desire to control through knowledge is offset by strategies of denial in an attempt to avoid unpalatable knowledge. The false edifice he has constructed can collapse only when he accepts the past and ceases to see Elsa's shadow as an object of terror, or, as this implies, when he embraces death willingly. The sense of death as a pleasurable escape into freedom is reinforced by references to the 'breeze' and 'morning light' as well as to the attainment of 'peace'.

The acceptance of death is represented by entry into Poppy Xavier's black Rolls Royce. The image of the car as a symbol of death is so hackneyed as to be comic; its sinister intertextual associations, such as to the car in Cocteau's film *Orphée*, are here transformed by humour. There is a parallel transformation of the archetypal, mysterious, female harbinger of death into the comfortable figure of Poppy. Judy Little sees an analogy between her as a goddess of death and Diana:

> Poppy, her name linking her with sleep, is a benign parody of an earth goddess. ...She is Diana, goddess of upper and nether worlds; associated with the more earthly aspects of death, with sleep and worms.[35]

Her extreme fatness is appropriate to an identification with the 'earthly aspect of death' and contrasts with the skeletal form associated with judgement and possible damnation. It is only on reflection that the reader may recognize a connection between her worms and corpses; when they hatch in the over-heated apartment they seem to relate to her abundance, to a life-force rather than to death.

The comic mode dominates the frenetic climax of the novel as Paul and Elsa rush from one New York night spot to another, fleeing from the other 'ghosts'. As they begin to dance, the descriptions become celebratory:

> But Elsa's shadow crosses Paul's. She dances apart from him, lightly swinging, moving her hips and feet only a little, but her shadow touches his. (p.126)

Here they make a decided success. Even Roloff himself wants to sign them up for a nightly floor show. A sharp-eyed youth with a mass of bushy hair somehow through the clang of the music and the quick bright flicker of multi-coloured lights, notices the fall of Elsa's shadow that crosses with Paul's while they

> dance. "Look at their dancing shadows!" he tells the crowd. ...
>
> ...Still Elsa's shadow dances with Paul's. He backs away, laughing, and lets her dance by herself. (p.134)

Their 'dance macabre' or 'dance of death' seems to represent Paul's acceptance of the lesson that Elsa and her shadow are able to teach about the need to accept 'unknowing' and surrender to death. The psychoanalysts within the text are singularly unable to help in this way. It is significant that the chapter containing Annie Armitage's list of the problems of New York concludes with, '"She missed out the mortality problem," Elsa says' (p.110). The implication is that if psychoanalysis participates in the 'obscene' denial of mortality it reinforces the regressive immaturity represented by Peter Pan. The denial is perceived, at least by Europeans, to be particularly prevalent in America and so the setting of the novel is appropriate to its critique of a pathological attitude to time and decay.

The novel's engagement with psychoanalysis enables it to pose its questions about the nature and ownership of problems and imply that ultimately the 'problem' is one of interpretation. This is territory covered by Jacqueline Rose in her study of *Peter Pan*:

> The problem is not, therefore, J.M.Barrie's - it is ours. Ours to the extent that we are undoubtedly implicated in the status which *Peter Pan* has acquired as the ultimate fetish of childhood.[36]

This is a reminder that if fictional texts have any meaning it is through their relation to extra-textual concerns. When as readers of *The Hothouse by the East River* we occupy the position of the analyst with the text as analysand we are challenged to understand what the text is saying about the pathology of Paul by drawing on our own experience. This operation may be seen as an example

of the 'desegregation' which Muriel Spark advocated in her address to the American Academy of Arts and Letters:

> I only say that the art and literature of sentiment and emotion, however beautiful in itself, has to go. It cheats us into a sense of involvement with life and society, but in reality it is a segregated activity. In its place I advocate the arts of satire and of ridicule. And I see no other living art form for the future.[37]

An equation is made in her argument between sentiment and emotion in literature and the comfort of escaping into the world of fiction. It is consistent with her aspiration that the satire and ridicule of her novel, in conjunction with its enigmas, should force the reader to think rather than feel and to consider the validity of its satirical strategies. If her weapons are perceived to have any force, it is because they target shortcomings that we recognize.

The use of satire and ridicule renders their targets absurd. The concept of absurdity is specifically evoked in the novel when Pierre says:

> There isn't any war and peace any more, no good and evil, no communism, no capitalism, no fascism. There's only one area of conflict left and that's between absurdity and intelligence. (p.63)

Ruth Whittaker is shocked by this, perceiving it as an authorial comment on the world: 'To substitute "intelligence and absurdity" for "good and evil" seems a form of profanity coming from Mrs Spark'[38]. However, the words are spoken by a fictional character whose status even within the text is equivocal. The shock registered by taking them as a comment on reality is tempered by a consideration of what might be relevant in purgatory, but even this leaves a question about the dismissal of 'good and evil' and the retention of 'absurdity and

intelligence'. Taken in conjunction with the whole text the statement reinforces its challenge to facile assumptions. The self-deceptions and misjudgements portrayed suggest that it is only through intelligence, not through an aspiration to virtue, that folly and absurdity can be avoided. Again this is consistent with the address to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in which Muriel Spark said:

> I would like to see in all forms of art and letters, ranging from the most sophisticated and high achievements to the placards that the students carry about the street, a less impulsive generosity, a less indignant representation of social injustice, and a more deliberate cunning, a more derisive undermining of what is wrong. I would like to see less emotion and more intelligence in these efforts to impress our minds and hearts.[39]

Peter Kemp links the concept of the absurd in the novel to its treatment of the anti-novel. He sees this as part of a sustained 'technique of reversal'[40], saying:

> ...the anti-novel's favoured strategy, the upsetting of usual literary procedures, is ironically turned against it in that here it is made to fight for necessity, order, and cohesion. It is a standard device of parody to twist or heighten fictional conventions so that what appeared significant is now shown to be absurd. To parody the anti-novel, Mrs Spark makes the absurd become significant.[41]

Two concepts of absurdity are being invoked: absurdity as a literary technique and the extratextual notion of folly. Peter Kemp's argument suggests that one may be used to expose the other. The novel's attack on absurdity implies that failures of intelligence have consequences for the well-being of the individual and for society. It deconstructs the opposition between a concentration on psychic or social health by indicating through its

portrayal of New York an intimate connection between the two. Foolish psychology and foolish sociology are ridiculed simultaneously. In spite of, or because of, its evident and extravagant absurdities the text extends to the reader the demand for intelligence.

3.4 *LOITERING WITH INTENT*

Bernard Harrison says, 'There is no other language in which one can express the life that is in parable'[1]. In his consideration of biblical parables he argues that they are able to compel recognition of alternative conceptual possibilities through their resistance to readings which conform to dominant ideology, and that this is the only way for their moral meanings to achieve an impact on an audience not previously disposed to accept them. It is helpful to consider the insistence on fictionality in *Loitering With Intent* in the light of his advocacy of the value of parable. The insistence emerges through a scrutiny of the boundary between fact and fiction in relation to the human subject, and a questioning of the extent to which autobiographical writing is the construction of a fictionalized version of the self. The concept of fiction as parable is explicitly endorsed by Muriel Spark. Furthermore, in writing about her conversion to Catholicism she makes a connection between this concept and her allegiance to materiality: 'Fiction to me is a kind of parable. ... One of the things which interested me particularly about the Church was its acceptance of matter. So much of our world rejects it'[2]. The conjunction of the acceptance of matter with the idea of parable seemingly refers to the reliance in fictional narratives on descriptions of objects and events through which abstract concepts may be conveyed. This embedding of the abstract within the material relates to Louis Marin's observation that parabolical narratives simultaneously unveil and conceal meanings[3]. It is this double action that always leaves a space for doubt about the possibility of any final meaning, making acts of interpretation possible and allowing the writing and reading of fiction to become processes of discovery.

The activity of the reader of *Loitering With Intent* is reflected by reading activities within the narrative. The emphasis on reading and writing is promoted through the choice of a novelist as narrator. Only three of Muriel Spark's novels to date use first person narration, the others being *Robinson* and *A Far Cry From Kensington*, and of the three narrators only Fleur Talbot is a novelist. The temptation thereby created to identify the narrator with the author is increased by numerous parallels between what is known about the author's life and experiences attributed to Fleur. The plot emphasis on the writing of autobiography constitutes a further invitation to such identification. It is one which Ruth Whittaker accepts:

> Indeed, the best account of Muriel Spark as an artist is given in her novel *Loitering With Intent*. This is clearly autobiographical, and extremely valuable in its revelation of how a writer's life and work are deeply interwoven.[4]

However, as she goes on to say, 'to attempt to separate the strands is a relevant activity on the part of the literary critic'. The novel itself contains repeated warnings against confusing fictional characters with real people. Dottie's method of reading is shown as inadequate because of her desire to identify with characters as though with human beings, a desire frequently fulfilled by classic realist texts:

> It was at this point Dottie said, "I don't know what you're getting at. Is Warrender Chase a hero or is he not?"
>
> "He is," I said.
>
> "Then Marjorie is evil."
>
> "How can you say that? Marjorie is fiction, she doesn't exist."
>
> "Marjorie is a personification of evil."
>
> "What is a personification?" I said. "Marjorie is only words."

"Readers like to know where they stand," Dottie said. "And in this novel they don't...". (p.53)

The argument that a character is *only* words is disingenuous; within the plot it is motivated by irritation but, more significantly, the overstatement alerts the reader to the need to recognize that characters are fabrications. The dialogue also signals that the reader of this novel need not expect it to provide the kind of pleasure desired by Dottie.

To treat the novel as autobiography shifts the centre of attention from the constructed narrative to the life that supposedly preceded it. This has implications which are addressed by theories concerning the status of the author as the source of textual meaning. In 'What is an author' Michel Foucault comments on the increasing critical emphasis, of the kind encouraged by Roland Barthes's essay 'The death of the author'[5], which has been placed on the text itself: '...the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence; he must assume the role of the dead man in the game of writing'[6]. He is, however, critical of the consequences of such arguments in so far as they licence interpretations of texts in terms of 'hidden meaning':

> To imagine writing as absence seems to be a simple repetition, in transcendental terms, of both the religious principle of inalterable and yet never fulfilled tradition, and the aesthetic principle of the work's survival, its perpetuation beyond the author's death, and its enigmatic *excess* in relation to him.[7]

The attempted effacement of the author derives from recognition that authors do not create the language they use nor the cultural codes already inscribed in it. But not acknowledging the historical specificity of the act of writing is as obscurantist as the reduction of textual meaning to the life of the writer. It is more helpful in

relation to *Loitering With Intent* to distinguish carefully between the real author, the implied author and the narrator[8] than to deny the relevance of any one of them. What may be deemed truly 'absent' is a romantic concept of the originating power of the author, itself a textual construct. Foucault's concern that denial of the author can encourage the search for hidden mysteries is evidently shared by Edward Said. In his essay 'The text, the world, the critic' Said's anxiety about 'the limitlessness of interpretation'[9] is linked to his conviction that analysis that focuses exclusively on the text fails to deal with the historical context within which texts are produced; this in turn leads to a failure to engage with the text's political dimension, its participation in debate about the world outside the text. By considering what intervention, if any, *Loitering With Intent* makes to debate about power relations in the external world, I hope to show that more is at stake than elegant games about its own nature.

One of many self-referential jokes in the novel concerns the construction of the narrator: 'For a moment I felt like a grey figment, the "I" of a novel whose physical description the author had decided not to set forth' (p.68). This alerts the reader to the absence of any physical description of Fleur. The result, however, is not a 'grey figment' and the apparent contradiction draws attention to the method whereby Fleur's characterization is established. The observation made about the revelation of Sir Quentin's character through the kind of information he considers worth recording is equally applicable to the narrator:

> He gave me a bulky list of the members' names with supporting biographical information so selective as to tell me, in fact, more about Sir Quentin than the people he described. (p.16)

The importance of this passage is highlighted by Fleur's delighted response and the metaphors used to convey pleasure in its artistry:

> ...I thought of this piece of art, the presentation of Major-General Sir George C. Beverley and all his etceteras, under the aspect of an infinitesimal particle of crystal, say sulphur, enlarged sixty times and photographed in colour so that it looked like an elaborate butterfly or an exotic sea flower. (p.16-17)

Jonathan Culler, in considering the construction of the narrator, objects that in this respect there is a lacuna in the five codes set out by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*:

> ...the absence of any code relating to narration (the reader's ability to collect items which help to characterize a narrator and to place the text in a kind of communication circuit) is a major flaw in Barthes analysis.[10]

His comment draws attention to the way in which a whole text contributes to the construction of its narrator. What is lacking from Barthes's analysis is an account of the cumulative effect of vocabulary, syntax and the selection of material in constituting the narrative voice. In *Loitering With Intent* repetition of the words 'joy', 'wonder', 'rejoicing' and 'enjoyed' is used to establish an image of the narrator as someone who is filled with exuberant delight by her surroundings as well as by her work. There is also an insouciance and apparent inconsequentiality about some of her utterances, and this is consistent with the refusal to dwell on introspection. When Fleur says, 'Now I treated the story of Warrender Chase with a light and heartless hand, as is my way when I have to give a perfectly serious account of things' (p.59), it underlines the lightness and heartlessness of the novel's narrative style; it also signals that these features should not be deemed incompatible with seriousness. This might be considered as an authorial

comment given that a combination of lightness with seriousness is characteristic of Muriel Spark's work.

The obscenities uttered by Solly and echoed by Edwina both contribute to and comment on the narrative voice. They reinforce a sense of gleeful delight in the refusal to be genteel while at the same time making a significant point about the relation established with the reader:

> "Fuck the general reader," Solly said, "because in fact the general reader doesn't exist."
>
> "That's what I say," Edwina yelled. "Just fuck the general reader. No such person. (p.56)
>
> ..."Tell him to wipe his arse with it," said Solly. "Don't sign." "Yes, oh yes," screamed Edwina. "Just tell that publisher to wipe his arse with that contract." (p.57)

The attack on the idea of a 'general reader' acknowledges that each act of reading is individual and private. It may also be taken as a declaration that the implied author is not concerned to achieve mass popularity. This is reinforced at the end of the novel: 'I always hope the readers of my novels are of good quality. I wouldn't like to think of anyone cheap reading my books' (p.157). The exaggerated snobbishness here reads as a humorous way of making a serious observation - a desire for readers who will recognize other forms of pleasure than those sought by Dottie. What is also being signalled is that the narrator is deliberately refusing to charm the reader, a refusal made explicit in:

> I wasn't writing poetry and prose so that the reader would think me a nice person, but in order that my sets of words should convey ideas of truth and wonder, as indeed they did to myself as I was composing them. (p.59)

The repudiation of charm is contrasted with the members of the Autobiographical Association whose writings manifest 'a transparent craving on the part of the authors to appear likeable' (p.23). The contrast implies that it is a sign of strength and sanity not to need to cultivate the approval of others; hence the narrator's refusal to conform to conventional notions of decorum and "niceness" is one of the ways in which her superiority is established.

The construction of the narrative voice is a dimension of Muriel Spark's writing on which she has made an interesting comment. The essay 'My conversion' includes:

> But the narrative part - first or third person - belongs to a character as well. I have to decide what the author of the narrative is like. It's not me, it's a character. ...Every theme demands a different sort of commentator, a different intellectual attitude. In order to achieve that you have to write the narrative from a consistent point of view that's not your own. I really have to live with it and that's why I have to do it quickly to maintain the consistency.[11]

Intertextual references in *Loitering With Intent* indicate the stimulus of literary antecedents in the formulation of Fleur as narrator. The novel acknowledges the use we make of models in constructing versions of ourselves as well as in literary composition when Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* is recommended as a suitable model to the members of the Autobiographical Association. The most pertinent intertextual model is, however, Cellini's *Life*, a book whose merit is repeatedly affirmed within the novel. A phrase of his which is quoted, 'I am now going on my way rejoicing' (quoted P.90), recurs frequently, most remarkably because of its apparent inconsequentiality in, 'When I got out at High Street Kensington it was raining and cold, and I went on my way rejoicing' (p.73). It is

not just in such precise verbal echoes that Cellini haunts the pages of *Loitering With Intent*; the two texts are linked by the gusto of the writing, the briskness with which events are described and the emphasis on action. Above all, the citing of Cellini's *Life* reinforces the importance of the narrator as artist.

The aspects of Cellini as artist which give Fleur especial pleasure are spelt out in the novel:

> I went to bed, and to take my mind off my troubles I started to flick the pages of my beloved Cellini. The charm worked, as I read the snatches of his adventures of art and of Renaissance virility, his love for the goblets and the statues he made out of materials he adored, his imprisonments, his escapes, his dealings with his fellow goldsmiths and sculptors, his homicides and brawls, and again his delight in every aspect of his craft. (p.88)

Fleur is made to share not only the love of a craft but something of his commitment to decisive action; vigorous protection of one's artistic property is sanctioned within the plot by reference to Cellini. After her readings from his *Life* Fleur embarks on the steps, including deception and theft, that lead to the recovery of her manuscript. The zest and artistic self-confidence which are features of both texts manifest themselves early in the novel:

> The thought came to me in a most articulate way: "How wonderful it feels to be an artist and a woman in the twentieth century." ...That I was an artist was a conviction so strong that I never thought of doubting it then or since.... (p.19-20)

Her confidence is again emphasized in, 'I had an art to practise and a life to live and faith abounding' (p.92). It is noteworthy that although the narrative records, 'I had been depressed most of the past six weeks' (p.144), this period is passed over and does not disturb the

vitality and energy of the narration. In this respect too there is a parallel with Cellini's writing; his text includes the phrase, 'I have a naturally melancholy disposition'[12], but this proclaimed melancholy has no noticeable impact on the manner of his self-presentation. The myth of the suffering necessary to art is a romantic concept which postdates Cellini and is specifically rejected by *Loitering With Intent*. Consequently neither text dwells on the depression or melancholy which they mention.

While discussing the Autobiographical Association's misuse of Newman's *Apologia* Fleur tells Dottie 'a far better model would be the *Life* of Cellini, robust and full-blooded as it was. A touch of normality...' (p.75). This stated preference for the robust over the contemplative supports Alan Kennedy's thesis that it is through action that we have awareness of our own existence and that this is a subject dealt with in Muriel Spark's writing. He presents as twin dangers 'capitulation to the roles of society' and 'complete subjective isolation or solipsism' and argues that 'to play freely created individual roles'[13] enables the self to avoid these two extremes. Because he sees these 'freely created roles' as fictions which are not identical with the self but which reflect back on the self and affirm its existence, he accords considerable importance to the fiction-making power:

> The ability to make fictions is thus the guarantee we need that we are not necessarily prisoners of our systems. Fictions may, then, be an "escape", but they are an escape from fictions, and delusions, and so an escape into freedom.[14]

For this to work it is crucial to recognize that we are acting out roles and that there is a separation between our behaviour and our concept of self. One of the ways in which this is relevant to *Loitering With Intent* consists

in the gap recognized between author and narrator; use of the fictional form opens up a space for performance, for presentation of the self as artist through role play. The novel's insistence on its own fictionality and on the importance of action can thus be seen as avoidance of 'capitulation' and of 'solipsism'.

The distinction made in the novel between Sir Quentin's interventions in the Autobiographical Association and those made by Fleur emphasizes the importance of freely creating fictions and not confusing them with life. Neither protagonist considers it necessary to adhere faithfully to the accounts of their lives given by the members, but Sir Quentin is shown to be dangerous because of his tampering with the lives rather than with the stories. Fleur realizes that he is 'pumping something artificial into their real lives instead of on paper' and 'destroying them with his needling after frankness' (p.83). He is dangerous because he desires power over other people and because of his romantic delusion that art stems from frank revelation of the self. If the self in question is not intrinsically interesting, then he tries to modify it by drugs and fasting so that its autobiography will be able to draw on more interesting material. The novel insists that this is inimical to life as well as to art by introducing the suicide of Bernice Gilbert and the decline of other members of the Association as a result of Sir Quentin's methods. Fleur, who believes in the separation of art from life - 'complete frankness is not a quality that favours art' (p.74) - modifies the stories, not the lives. She comments, 'At least I did them the honour of treating their output as life-stories not as case-histories for psychoanalysis, as they more or less were; I had set them on to writing fictions about themselves' (p.83). The writing of fictions is depicted as potentially liberating

and conducive to health, an escape from self-absorption into the pleasure of play and creation. The construction of a story represents engagement in the outside world whereas frank confession thrusts one back into the self.

The text makes clear that not all novelists respect the boundaries of fiction-making which it implicitly endorses. It includes a second novelist to serve as a foil to Fleur; her lively engagement in the world around her is contrasted with Leslie's self-absorption, and, not surprisingly, the novel he writes, *Two Ways*, is shown to be an account of his own experience. The characters in *Loitering With Intent* of which we are clearly meant to approve all enjoy Lady Edwina, and Leslie fails this test:

> He was very much absorbed with numerous private anxieties which he was too self-centred to overcome now, when I was presenting him with this splendid apparition, Edwina, an ancient, wrinkled, painted spirit wrapped in luxurious furs. ...Leslie just sat there and let himself be interviewed, unable to forget himself and his own concerns, with his young face and good health contrasting with Edwina's dotty shrewdness, her scarlet nails, her bright avid eyes. (p.38)

Fleur, by contrast, is depicted as delighting not only in Edwina but in all those she meets, relishing enemies as well as friends: 'In a sense I felt that the swine Alexander was quite excellent as such, surpassingly handpicked' (p.8); 'An awful woman. But to me, beautifully awful' (p.13). Fleur's criticism of the 'diction' (p.154) of Leslie's novel adds to the indictment; again the contrast is used to her advantage, reinforcing her love of the craft of writing, a love which is evidently lacking in him. The account of the process whereby she creates characters insists on the necessity of combining observation, creative imagination and pleasure in the exercise of skill:

I made no notes at all, but most nights I would work on my novel and the ideas of the day would reassemble themselves to form those two female characters which I created in *Warrender Chase*, Charlotte and Prudence. Not that Charlotte was entirely based on Beryl Tims, not by a long way. Nor was my ancient Prudence anything like a replica of Sir Quentin's Mummy. The process by which I created my characters was instinctive, the sum of my whole experience of others and of my own potential self; and so it has always been. (p.19)

This might be accepted as an *apologia* by many novelists. They might also share Fleur's insistence that she is 'an artist, not a reporter' (p.109), a distinction which underlines the novel's repeated emphasis on the difference between the creation of fiction and the attempt to record 'frankly' one's perceptions of reality. Dottie's praise of *Two Ways*, 'it's a very frank novel' (p.74), is thus another indication that this novel is to be condemned as a creative failure.

The claim that fiction-making is a form of action that engages with the world is important to the conception of the artist which informs *Loitering With Intent*. The text ensures that there is no doubt about this definition of action:

> In a discourse on drama it was observed by someone famous that action is not merely fisticuffs, meaning of course that the dialogue and the sense are action too. Similarly, the action of my life-story in 1949 included the work I was doing when I put my best brains into *Warrender Chase* most nights and most of Saturdays. My *Warrender Chase* was action just as much as when I was arguing with Dottie over Leslie.... (p.43)

The novelist's vindication of herself is given throughout the text in terms of what she has done as a writer rather than what she has achieved as a spiritual, social or

sexual being. The assertion, 'I was going about my proper business' (p.60), derives additional authority from the biblical echo of 'wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?'[18] The intertextual parallel with Cellini's artistic commitment encourages the reader to draw on a set of cultural assumptions about the lives of artists, and more specifically artists in Renaissance Italy, and to consider their pertinence to the novel. In her 1903 introduction to Cellini's *Life*, Anne Macdonell compared contemporary artists with those of the Renaissance:

> Art today is not respected; does not respect itself.... The arrogance of the artist is, therefore, now a pathetically ineffective protest against the materialism of the times, or mere personal conceit. But such arrogance in sixteenth-century Italy had a whole world of glorious achievement to back it, achievement which had captured the general sentiment, and made the artist in popular belief the man best worth paying for. Moreover, the arrogance had for its good neighbour professional self-respect.[19]

She goes on to express for Cellini himself 'whole-hearted admiration of the man who loved his work with a consuming love such as makes us busy mechanics of a later day pause and wonder'. Such heroic romanticizing of the Renaissance artist is sufficiently widespread for the references to Cellini in *Loitering With Intent* to serve as a foil to the presentation of Fleur. They suggest that what might be considered boastfulness and arrogance could be termed proper pride in one's craft, or 'professional self-respect'.

While Cellini is used to reinforce the value that is to be placed on artistic achievement, the novel's references to Newman's *Apologia* also carry considerable weight. The grounds on which Fleur recommends 'the sublime pages of

Newman's autobiography' to Maisie are the hope that they 'would tether her mind to the sweet world of living people' (p.54); she is appalled at the consequences. The reading aloud by Maisie of a passage provokes a strong reaction:

> I had always up to now had a particular liking for this passage, feeling a fierce conviction of its power and general application as a human ideal. But as Maisie uttered the words I felt a revulsion against an awful madness I then discovered in it. "... My mistrust of material phenomena ... two and two only supreme and luminously self-evident beings, my Creator and myself." I was glad of my strong hips and sound cage of ribs to save me from flying apart, so explosive were my thoughts. But I heard myself saying, coldly, "It's quite a neurotic view of life. It's a poetic vision only. Newman was a nineteenth century romantic." (p.69-70)

She adds later, 'You can't live with an I-and-thou relationship to God and doubt the reality of the rest of life' (p.70). The tension which Maisie's reading brings out is between a view of the passage as affirming a sense of spiritual unity with God and its interpretation as a neurotic rejection of the rest of mankind. Fleur is sympathetic to the one but realizes that the alternative possibility makes it potentially dangerous in that it can be taken to sanction an attitude to life of which she disapproves. The novel indicates that different desires produce different readings, and implies that some readings, and readers, are to be preferred to others. The dismay attributed to Fleur stems from seeing the writing of a fellow Catholic used to endorse a non-religious promotion of the egotistical self, a view of the self which she rejects as 'romantic'.

The original context of the Newman passage reveals an added interest in relation to Muriel Spark. The novel's acknowledgement of this context is precise but incomplete:

> It was the passage, early in the book, where Newman describes his religious feelings as a boy. He felt he was elected to eternal glory. He said the actual belief gradually faded away but that it had an influence on the opinions of his early youth.... (p.68)

As the word 'elected' signals, Newman is describing the influence of Calvinist doctrine on his spiritual development. He says that the conviction of being 'elected to final glory' endured 'till the age of twenty-one, when it gradually faded away'[17]. Muriel Spark's upbringing in Scotland exposed her to the influence of Calvinism, which adds to the significance of the choice of this particular quotation. It indicates that the parallels between their religious developments are not confined to their conversions via Anglicanism to Roman Catholicism.

In spite of her dismay at recognizing some validity in Maisie's interpretation, Fleur continues to find the *Apologia* 'lovely' (p.141). Its importance in relation to the purposes of the novel is indicated by a passage which is quoted towards the end:

> ...I recognized what I had to do, though I shrank from both the task and the exposure which it would entail. I must, I said, give the true key to my whole life; I must show what I am that it may be seen what I am not, and that the phantom may be extinguished which gibbers instead of me. I wish to be known as a living man, and not as a scarecrow which is dressed up in my clothes... (quoted p.141)

Newman undertook his task because he recognized the futility of answering accusations with rational, point by point refutations. He expressed confidence in being able to refute each of Kingsley's charges but was equally

confident that such rejoinders would not sway public opinion. It was the general mistrust which supported Kingsley's attack that needed to be countered, and the only way to do this, he decided, was to reveal as fully as possible the development of his theological thinking. He justifies this decision in the following terms:

> He asks about my Mind and its Beliefs and its sentiments; and he shall be answered; - not for his own sake, but for mine, for the sake of the Religion which I profess, and of the Priesthood in which I am unworthily included, and of my friends and of my foes, and of that general public which consists of neither one nor the other, but of well-wishers, lovers of fair play, sceptical cross-questioners, interested inquirers, curious lookers-on, and simple strangers, unconcerned and yet not careless about the issue, - for the sake of all these he shall be answered.[18]

This commitment to public accountability is a corrective to the intensely private figure of the passage quoted by Maisie. There is an implication in Muriel Spark's use of the *Apologia* that she too feels she has been misunderstood and misjudged and has attempted to counter false opinions by giving in *Loitering With Intent* the 'true key to [her] whole life'. If the analogy holds, it could also be seen as an endeavour undertaken for the sake of the art she practises, not just for personal satisfaction. If so, she certainly goes about it more indirectly than her mentor, hinting at her purpose by reference to his rather than stating it directly. To make sense of such claims it is necessary to consider what the novel tells us about the nature of the charges levelled against the writer.

The title itself is self-accusatory, implying that there is something criminal about the actions of writers. The intention behind their loitering is presumably the collection of useful material and this may entail seizing

on interesting specimens of humanity in order to transform them in the process of creating characters. The reference to a specific crime suggests that this can be seen as tantamount to stealing something from the human specimens selected. Margaret Drabble in *The Millstone* deals with the way a writer's drawing on other people for material may be resented by those same people as a betrayal of friendship and an abuse of confidence. The first-person narrator reads a novel which is being written by the friend who is living in her flat and observes, 'It was nothing more nor less than my life story, with a few minor alterations here and there...'[19]. She describes her reaction:

> All in all, by the time I had finished this work I was both annoyed and upset. ...I was also very annoyed by the thought that Lydia had been living in my house for nothing and writing all this about me without saying a word. She had compared herself once to a spider, an image not wholly new, drawing material from its own entrails, but this seemed to be a somewhat more parasitic pursuit.[20]

The inclusion of this in a novel reads like an admission of concern by the writer that she may justly be accused of a parasitic exploitation of others.

Fleur, however, does not have the unease about using people conveyed in Margaret Drabble's text; she consistently claims that she creates characters rather than represents those around her. Moreover, the incident in the Kensington churchyard is treated humorously:

> ...suppose I had been committing a crime sitting there on the gravestone, what crime would it be? "Well, it could be desecrating and violating," he said, "it could be obstructing and hindering without due regard, it could be loitering with intent." ...He wished me the best of luck and went on his way. (p.143)

(Presumably policemen are not supposed to go on their way 'rejoicing' in their work.) One effect of this is to ridicule the definition of crime; how many activities could be subsumed under 'loitering with intent'? And the novel is concerned to distinguish between sin and crime; certain illegal acts, such as the theft of property, are represented as of minor importance compared with sins, such as the exercise of undue power over others, which lie outside the realm of law[21]. But in spite of the lightness of touch here, Fleur's writing is afforded such power to affect others that several characters desire its suppression. There is an implication that if writing did not have the power to be evil and dangerous, it would be trivial. Hence the strong claim made for the significance of Fleur's work requires, as a corollary, acknowledgement that the ends served by writing might be evil as well as good.

Frances Russell Hart sees a connection between Muriel Spark's sustained interest in blackmail and the dangerous powers of fiction. He locates this within the Scottish context of her development as a writer:

> And for Muriel Spark, heritor of a Calvinist distrust of fictions as spiritual forgeries, the role of the moral blackmailer is precariously close to the role of the artist. Both play at godly powers; both impart a creaturely reality and freedom that are unreal; both consort with demons and spirits, and are ultimately as unfree as the creatures they manipulate.[22]

This appears to be diametrically opposed to Alan Kennedy's argument about the liberating capacity of fiction. Its forceful account of the 'precariousness' of the distinction between artist and moral blackmailer is helpful in indicating the need for Muriel Spark to spell out the difference between the ways in which Sir Quentin and Fleur tamper with biography. It also reinforces the

importance Kennedy attaches to the recognition of role-play and fiction-making.

Fleur is accused of immorality, coldness and heartlessness. These charges echo some of the criticisms made of Muriel Spark by friends and literary critics. Derek Stanford, for many years a close associate, says of her writing:

> First we feel it, maybe, as an astringency: a curious avoidance of the genial, of anything that might promote an *entente cordiale* between author and reader. Next, we realise that she does not share the same tastes and values as we do. That she is right and we are wrong can never, for one moment, be doubted by her. Her mastery depends on her unqualified assumption of superiority.[23]

The rejection of Dottie's wish for emotional engagement with the text can be seen as one way of attacking the expectations on which Stanford's criticisms are based. His objection to authorial domination is shared by Elizabeth Dipple, who writes, '...readers have complained about the non-participatory imposition of authorial will on the reader, who has no choice except acquiescence or open rebellion'[24]. There is certainly no implied criticism of the narrator of *Loitering With Intent*, no discernible gap between implied author and narrator. Muriel Spark's unapologetic continuation with the construction of assertive narrators is a dimension of the textual omniscience seen by some critics as a reflection of God's power over humans. Malcolm Bradbury explains the link he sees between her writing strategies and religion:

> ...we should take her preoccupations with plots and grids and fictions as more than a part of current speculative rage for aesthetic order, but also as a distinct urgency about truth - a desire to rouse through the model of the writer's action the eschatological question.[25]

Assertive, omniscient narrators may be insufficiently democratic for some readers, but as well as reflecting authorial creativity they affirm 'professional self-respect'. Another criticism, but this time one that is countered within *Loitering With Intent*, is made by Patricia Stubbs when she says of Muriel Spark:

> her belief in the truth dissuades her from believing in the entire truthfulness of fiction, encouraging her rather to consider novels as trifles, play, to evaporate her talents in a light-minded way.[26]

The humorless assumption that to be serious necessitates solemnity is denied by Fleur's insistence that her writing is simultaneously 'light and heartless' and 'perfectly serious' (p.59).

The irritation in Derek Stanford's criticism of Muriel Spark's heroines reads like an attack on the writer herself. He asserts that two of them, Sybil and Needle, are 'without charity, humility or love'[27] and says that the religious heroines are 'peevish, tiresome, interfering, self-important'[28]. Newman was also accused of lacking feeling. He specifically stated that this was not so but that he thought it proper to offer the public reasoned, logical statements, not expressions of emotion. The introduction in *Loitering With Intent* of the notion of depression merely in order to exclude it from elaboration draws attention to the distinction between possession of emotion and its display. The comparison with Newman is an indication that the novelist has not sought logical disputation of individual charges made against her but rather to offer in fictional form a statement of her artistic creed.

The analogy with Newman might lead to an expectation that *Loitering With Intent* would deal with the spiritual life of the narrator. On the contrary, the heroine's religious

faith is asserted but not explained. The only explanation of the grounds of her morality is characteristically sweeping and delivered in a comic tone; when describing the process of learning to write by copying out maxims - 'Necessity is the Mother of Invention', 'All is not Gold that Glisters', 'Honesty is the Best Policy' and 'Discretion is the Better Part of Valour' - Fleur comments that 'They may lack the grandeur of the Ten Commandments but they are more to the point' (p.107). This provocative statement is left to the reader to ponder as no further explanation is provided. The maxims are, however, consistent with the worldliness endorsed by the novel and its commitment to action as opposed to metaphysical speculation.

There is a point at which Fleur draws back from identification with Newman. Again it marks a rejection of introspection, as well as of an attitude that could be defined as paranoid:

> 'There came to my mind a phrase of John Henry Newman's in his journals: "...the thousand whisperings against me..." No sooner had I thought of this than I decided to put an end to my brooding. Finish. Cut it out. (p.108)

The emphasis on externality which recurs throughout Muriel Spark's oeuvre is highlighted by Fleur's observation, 'If I had conceived Warrender Chase's motives as a psychological study I would have said so. But I don't go in for motives, I never have' (p.61). The novel asserts that in order to make valid judgements it is necessary to engage with other people but also to achieve detachment from them. The danger of paranoid isolation is contrasted with the danger of misguided discipleship. The importance of separation is evident when Fleur says, 'Although I wasn't yet rid of Sir Quentin and his little sect, they were morally outside of myself, they were objectified. I

would write about them one day' (p.142). The question of what constitutes discipleship and whether it is legitimate is raised by Sir Quentin's asking of Newman 'Did he not form under his influence a circle of devoted spiritual followers? Am I not entitled to do the same?' (p.137). The only response in the text is Fleur's comment,'You had this desire to take possession of people before I came along and reminded you of the existence of Newman' (p.137). However, the actions depicted throughout the story leave no doubt that Sir Quentin's claim to spiritual authority is spurious and his analogy with Newman is absurd. 'Taking possession of people' is not to be confused with attracting followers by the power of argument.

In support of his contention that novels fulfil a political function, Edward Said writes:

> ...the Western novelistic tradition, from *Don Quixote* on is full of examples of texts insisting not only on their circumstantial reality but also upon their status as *already* fulfilling a function, a reference, or a meaning *in the world*.[29]

It is hard to see how this could not be so, but some functions may carry more political weight than others. By now I hope it has been demonstrated that debates about fictionality and selfhood cannot be dismissed as of only narrowly literary import. *Loitering With Intent* also engages with issues of power in the contemporary world through its participation in debate about what it means to be 'a woman and an artist in the twentieth century' (p.129). There are two ways in which this repeated phrase (the first time it appears, however, the sequence is 'an artist and a woman...' (p.19-20)) differentiates Fleur from her beloved Cellini: gender and epoch. It would not have been so much fun trying to succeed as a woman writer in sixteenth-century Italy. Even in the twentieth century the novel claims that women encounter problems if they

want to achieve distinction in a demanding role other than that of wife and mother. Although women have succeeded in being mothers and writers, the novel indicates that a woman whose avowed priority lies outside the domestic sphere risks being accused of unnaturalness and unwomanliness. The juxtaposition of Fleur with the 'English Roses', Dottie and Beryl, clarifies what is at issue and enables the novel to challenge some conventional notions of what is 'womanly'.

One of the paradoxes of fictional characters is that they both are and are not 'only words'. In attempting to define the '*differentia specifica* of characters in narrative fiction'[30] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan emphasizes that they are both 'nodes in the verbal design' and 'partly modelled on the reader's conception of people and in this they are person-like'[31]. When we say a fictional character is "credible" or "life-like" we are saying not that it conforms to "real life" but to what we conceive of as real life, what Jonathan Culler calls 'the text of the natural attitude'[32]. The portrayal of Beryl Timms is sufficiently recognizable and venomous to constitute an attack on widespread social attitudes and values. She is portrayed as 'simpering' and possessing 'acquisitive greed' (p.20); most significantly, she claims to know about men's tastes: 'Men don't like to see lipstick on the rim of your cup and your glass, isn't that so?' and, 'Men like to see a bit of jewellery on a girl' (p.21). What is shown as irritating is not just the bland certainty about men's wishes, nor even the assumption that all men are alike, but her unquestioning acceptance that any "normal" woman must seek fulfilment through men. Dottie is grouped with Beryl as an 'English Rose' because of her participation in this attitude. Both are offended by Fleur's off-handedness about men and her rejection of the idea of marriage. Her attitude does not just differ from theirs; it attacks the

entire basis of their lives, challenging the assumption that the goal of all women is the achievement of marital status. This clash is brought out when Fleur tells Dottie that because she's writing a novel she may not have much time for her lover:

> Dottie was relieved that she wasn't in danger of losing her man, at the same time as she was horrified by what she called my unnatural attitude, which in fact was quite natural to me.
>
> "Your head rules your heart," she said in her horror. (p.21)

Fleur's indifference to marriage is more at odds with the conventions prevailing in 1949-1950, the period covered by the action of the novel, than in 1981 when it was published. However, Muriel Spark's characteristic refusal to attach importance to sex continues to challenge cultural norms.

Dottie's anxiety about the loss of her husband is counterpointed with Fleur's anxiety about the loss of *Warrender Chase*. Each represents loss of their most prized possession. However, Fleur's claim to her novel is the one validated by the text for it is her own creation, whereas Dottie's claim is seen to emanate from a false sense of self-definition, one that depends not on oneself but on attachment to another, as well as on a misplaced concept of property - possession of 'her man'. It is made clear that when Sir Quentin uses parts of the text of *Warrender Chase* he is depriving Fleur of more than a material possession; he is stealing part of herself, of her own mind. The novel does not deny that devotion to work may entail lack in other respects, but insists on the importance of choice: 'I preferred to be interested as I was than happy as I might be. I wasn't sure that I so much wanted to be happy, but I knew I had to follow my nature' (p.78). This also calls into question the facile

assumption that the most important human goal is happiness.

The writing of a novel about a woman artist and the time when she was producing her first published work is in itself an assertion that the subject is worthy of treatment. This is underlined by the self-referentiality of debates within the novel about what constitutes a story that merits the telling. Sir Quentin is used as a comic foil in this debate for his 'orgasm over a title' (p.105) leaves him in no doubt that the possession of ancient lineage or military rank is sufficient to guarantee the interest of the life story of its possessor. He rejects criticism of the behaviour of Father Egbert Delaney by saying with absurd irrelevance, 'One of his ancestors fought in the battle of Bosworth Field' (p.82). Fleur argues that in one respect this attitude is too democratic:

> His snobbery was immense. But there was a sense in which he was too democratic for the likes of me. He sincerely believed that talent, although not equally distributed by nature, could be later conferred by a title or acquired by inherited rank. (p.18)

Inevitably her own view is that the stories of those with exceptional ability are worth telling - 'The boyhood experiences of Newman or of Michelangelo would be interesting however trivial...' (p.82-83) - but she also supports the intrinsic interest of some stories:

> From the personal reminiscences of the members I had perceived that anecdotes and memoirs are only valuable if they are extremely unusual in themselves, or if they attach to an interesting end-product. (p.82)

The introduction of two possible justifications makes for ambiguity in relation to Fleur's statement about her own narrative, and hence about the novel we are reading:

However sinister the theme of my *Warrender Chase* which was then uppermost in my mind, no one can say it isn't a spirited novel. But I think that ordinary readers would be astonished to know what troubles fell on my head because of the sinister side, and that is part of this story of mine; and that's what I think makes it worth the telling. (p.46)

This seems to be saying that the difficulties confronted by the young woman novelist are intrinsically interesting, but it also implies that the novelist's success in her chosen profession justifies autobiography.

An analogy not made in the text but which the text invites is with James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Joyce's decision to draw on his own life while at the same time selecting and shaping the material so as to emphasize his development as a writer provides a precedent for Muriel Spark's practice. However, the analogy holds only up to a point; Fleur is already a writer at the beginning of the story and her vocation and artistic ability are, like Cellini's, taken as givens. The selection and shaping of material that is licensed by the choice of an avowedly fictional mode may be connected with the argument that a novel is distinguished by its mythology:

> Without a mythology a novel is nothing. The true novelist, one who understands the work as a continuous poem, is a myth-maker, and the wonder of the art resides in the endless different ways of telling a story, and the methods are mythological by nature. (p.100)

The imposition of mythological form onto autobiographical material links *Loitering With Intent* to another of its literary intertexts, one referred to only briefly when Fleur says, 'I was thinking how much unpaid overtime I had saved myself by failing to remind them of Proust and his

fictional autobiography' (p.70). Proust's writing is valued not for who he was but for what he did with his material, or in other words for his mythology rather than his life. The sentence from Proust which Muriel Spark quotes in her article on him, 'Time, as it flows, is so much time wasted and nothing can ever be truly possessed save under that aspect of eternity which is also the aspect of art'[33], is echoed, but with a difference, when Fleur says, 'But you must understand that everything happens to an artist; time is always redeemed, nothing is lost and wonders never cease' (p.83). This applies even at the level of language for clichés, which are appropriately deadening when uttered by Dottie, are revitalized when used by Fleur. Adherence to the physical specificity of the external world, the quality in Proust's writing so admired by Muriel Spark, informs the recoil from the idea put forward by Maisie that 'autobiographies ought to start with the ultimates of the Great Beyond and not fritter away their time on the actual particulars of life' (p.30). The 'aspect of art' transforms the 'actual particulars of life' by its capacity to make them cohere into myth; ultimates emanate from the specific, not from airy vagueness.

The distinction between factual autobiography and fictional characterization no longer holds once it is accepted that the concept of coherent selves, which we need to possess in order to function, is a construct. Nevertheless there is a difference between autobiography and the novel and this may best be explained by reference to the idea of a narrative contract. They are classified as different genres and, as Jonathan Culler asserts, this is not just an exercise in taxonomy:

> ...what we speak of as conventions of a genre or an *écriture* are essentially possibilities of meaning, ways of naturalizing the text and giving it a place in the

> world which our culture defines. To assimilate or interpret something is to bring it within the modes of order which culture makes available, and this is usually done by talking about it in a mode of discourse which a culture takes as natural.[34]

What the reader assumes is offered as a contract by the use of the words 'biography' or 'autobiography' is an endeavour to tell what actually happened; it makes valid the concept of lying. The word 'novel' on the other hand entails a different contractual promise; the reader's search for 'vraisemblance' will be at the level of the coherence of the overall design as well as its relation to what is conceived of as 'natural' outside the text, and the concept of lying is no longer pertinent. Thus the distinctions made within *Loitering With Intent* between biography and fiction are operational, even though in this instance the text that within the story is presented as autobiography is, at the level of discourse, a novel.

The novel uses the device of framing one story, *Warrender Chase*, within another as a means of opening up the possibility of playing with generic differences. In addition to its function in drawing attention to the narrative mode of the framing text, the framed narrative allows for the making of strong claims for fiction. There is no room for doubt that characters and events occur in *Warrender Chase* prior to their realization in the framing text. One effect of this is to reinforce the denial that the writer merely records her observations; on the contrary, it apparently claims that the exercise of her creative imagination, based on her understanding of those she witnesses, is so powerful that it is able to predict human behaviour. But this is to overstate what reads as a joke, echoing Oscar Wilde's 'Life follows art', and one moreover that exceeds plausibility. The lack of plausibilty insists on the fictionality of both texts, and

in any case the reader knows that both are invented by the same author. But although the manner is playful, the strategy can be seen as another example of a light-hearted way of making a serious comment. The insistence that the fictional world is a creation rather than a mimetic representation of a world that already exists identifies the artist with God. The creative power of fiction is commented on by Alan Kennedy: 'Fictional description is unique in that the description of something is also simultaneously the creation of that thing'[35]. This can be related to the words used in reflecting on Sir Quentin's list, 'I realized ... how much *religious energy* he had put into it' (p.17); their connotation is precise. The assertion of the god-like power of creative energy is accompanied by recognition that it can serve evil ends as well as good; respecting the boundaries, however fragile they may be, between life and art is shown as essential to human well-being.

CHAPTER FOUR: CULTURAL ATTITUDES AND THE IDEA OF PLACE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The intertextual associations of physical settings contribute to the overall design of all Muriel Spark's novels. The particular significance of Lorraine, Jerusalem and New York has already been discussed in relation to *The Only Problem*, *The Mandelbaum Gate* and *The Hothouse By the East River*. The decision to devote a chapter specifically to the idea of place, therefore, is clearly not meant to restrict its importance to the texts chosen for detailed consideration. There are, however, features of the treatment of place in these texts which are of particular interest. The inclusion of a chapter on this subject is also intended to emphasize the range of intertexts which informs a reading of the novels, and to bring out the importance of those which may be termed "cultural attitudes" as well as those which are written.

In European culture the city of Venice is rich in connotations. Its association with both love and death is brought out amusingly by Byron's description of gondolas in *Beppo*:

> And round the theatres, a sable throng,
> They wait in their dusk livery of woe, -
> But not to them do woeful things belong,
> For sometimes they contain a deal of fun,
> Like mourning coaches when the funeral's done.[1]

The richness of its art and architecture, as well as its remarkable setting, have made Venice a target for visitors since the days of the Venetian Republic. Its romantic connotations were increased rather than diminished by the decline in its wealth and power. All this provides a sufficiently strong set of images and ideas to allow the

writer plenty of scope to play both with and against convention. The title of *Territorial Rights* signals the centrality of the novel's concern with place, and its Venetian setting enables it to deconstruct a series of contrasts between past and present, the exotic and the familiar, the glamorous and the sordid, thereby challenging prevailing attitudes.

The other novel I have decided to consider in this chapter is *The Takeover*. The significance of situating the action in Nemi is brought out through references to *The Golden Bough* by Sir James Frazer. The historical perspective opened up by means of invoking the remote past is in itself a form of critique of current preoccupations. Furthermore, its reference to a cyclic concept of historical change can be linked to Bakhtin's theories of the carnivalesque, and this connection is helpful in elucidating the novel's refusal to take seriously the changes of fortune which feature in its narrative. There are similarities between this novel and Muriel Spark's most recent one, *Symposium*. Both feature affluent, jet-setting characters in a contemporary setting and both deal with the possession and loss of property. It appears significant that Bakhtin's interest in Plato's *Symposium* is reflected in the later novel's title. At the least this indicates a shared interest in the dialogic form of the dinner table conversation as a literary mode.

The wealthy, cosmopolitan characters in *Symposium* are in marked contrast to those depicted in Muriel Spark's other London novels. All the novels set in London evoke precise social milieus through pinpointing the characters' residences. This technique depends for its success on the reader's recognition of the differentiations charted by reference to such places as Kensington, Hampstead, Paddington, Golders Green and Peckham. In ones which refer

back to an earlier period of the writer's life there is an encapsulation of the past within a mythologized construction of time and place. This is reinforced by the stylistic reference to fairy tales or legends which characterizes the opening of *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963): 'Long ago in 1945 all the nice people in England were poor, allowing for exceptions' (p.7). *Loitering With Intent* has a similar opening: 'One day in the middle of the twentieth century I sat in an old graveyard which had not yet been demolished, in the Kensington area of London...' (p.7). These novels re-animate a time of post-war poverty and of lives restricted to small groups of acquaintances and specific locations. The precision of all the London settings contributes to the evocation of period and to the representation of social mores in different sub-cultural groups. Their variety emerges as more significant than any overall image of the city, hence my preference for the greater coherence of Venice as a text exemplifying the idea of place.

Seven of Muriel Spark's novels are set in London and only one in Edinburgh, her home city. In 'What images return' she discusses the importance of the city in shaping her attitudes, but also refers to her need to escape from it; she records, 'Edinburgh is the place that I, a constitutional exile, am exiled from'[2]. Several Scottish critics have been helpful in reminding us that she is a Scottish writer and in indicating ways in which her provenance has affected her work. In *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* Edinburgh is evoked through extended descriptions which also contribute to the thematic structure of the whole. One of the Scottish critics, Alan Bold, comments on the poetic language used to create the images of the city. He links them to the plot, saying, 'The contradictions in Jean Brodie's character are partly explained by the contrasts apparent in Edinburgh'[3]; these

contradictions are evident in the contrast between the New Town and the Old, observed by the Brodie set when Jean Brodie takes them on the famous walk. This walk is used to emphasize the division between middle-class Edinburgh and the impoverished Old Town:

> Now they were in a great square, the Grassmarket, with the Castle, which was in any case everywhere, rearing between a big gap in the houses where the aristocracy used to live. It was Sandy's first experience of a foreign country, which intimates itself by its new smells and shapes and its new poor. (p.32)

This passage brings out that what we inhabit is not just a geographical location, but a cultural, class-based milieu. The differences this gives rise to are reflected on in the novel:

> And many times throughout her life Sandy knew with a shock, when speaking to people whose childhood had been in Edinburgh, that there were other people's Edinburghs quite different from hers, and with which she held only the names of districts and streets and monuments in common. Similarly, there were other people's nineteen-thirties. (p.33)

The importance of place in this novel, and its acknowledgement of alternative textual constructions of both time and place, would justify its selection as one of the novels to be given detailed consideration in this chapter. However, its relatively full treatment by critics as well as the particularly interesting use of setting in *Territorial Rights* led to my preference for the latter. The fact that both the selected novels are set in Italy did not determine the choice; nevertheless, what appeared to be coincidence may actually be a reflection of the perception by Europeans that Italy is central to their cultural, political and religious inheritance.

4.2 *TERRITORIAL RIGHTS*

Every reader brings to *Territorial Rights* images of Venice and ideas associated with that city. Even those who have spent time in Venice will retain images and ideas drawn from texts. These texts include a variety of the modes through which information is disseminated in our culture - films, television documentaries and travel shows, magazine articles, photographs taken by friends and relatives, as well as novels and stories. Perhaps 'every reader' requires qualification. A reader brought up in Venice, or even elsewhere in Italy, would be unlikely to share the conceptions attributed to the English characters in the novel. Grace Gregory is made to represent the parochially complacent visitor for whom only England can be "home"; this is given humorous emphasis when she says, 'She's a foreigner, too. I mean, even for here, where everyone's a foreigner she's a foreigner' (p.127). But the novel is written from the perspective of those for whom Venice is "foreign", for whom it is redolent of romance and exoticism, and it is their ideas which are reflected, and satirized, within the text.

These ideas are related to the 'cultural stereotypes' which Jonathan Culler discusses in his consideration of 'vraisemblance':

> there is a range of cultural stereotypes or accepted knowledge which a work may use but which do not enjoy the same privileged status as elements of the first type [the 'real'], in that the culture itself recognizes them as generalizations.[1]

He goes on to say that although such stereotypes may be acknowledged as oversimplifications, nevertheless they 'at least make the world initially intelligible and consequently serve as a target language in the process of

naturalization'[2]. His analysis helps elucidate the functioning of the references to Venice in *Territorial Rights*. Because Muriel Spark is able to assume her readers' possession of the cultural stereotypes which constitute a shared conception of "Venice", she is able to play with them either by their adoption or by subjecting them to ironic reversals. The reversals, as well as being comic, have the effect of revealing the conventionalized nature of the conception. However, as Culler's stress on the culture's awareness of generalization makes clear, it is important not to imply that such a revelation would necessarily come as a surprise. A discussion of cultural codes is all too likely to suggest a naive participation in them by readers, failing to recognize that access to such codes does not necessitate uncritical acceptance. This helps explain why deconstructive strategies may well consolidate the readers' own criticisms rather than challenge their convictions; confirmation is, indeed, one of the sources of pleasure in reading.

The difficulty of encouraging readers to identify their own ideas as the target of attack is a subject addressed by Wolfgang Iser in *The Implied Reader*. His analysis of strategies used in the novels of Henry Fielding and William Makepeace Thackeray is particularly interesting in its indication of ways in which they succeed in unsettling the readers' complacency. He argues that readers tend to identify with the morality endorsed by the text they are reading; an alternative is to reject it on the basis that their own morality is superior. In neither case are readers forced to question themselves. This is what Iser affirms is achieved in *Joseph Andrews*, *Tom Jones*, and even more emphatically in *Vanity Fair*. He argues that these novels, by refusing to give clear indications of what is to be deemed the correct moral stance, oblige the reader

to work hard in an attempt to find one. He suggests that the effect is far-reaching:

> As the text invites him to imagine for himself what would be the right reaction to the given situation, he is bound to make the necessary adjustments consciously, and this process must in turn make him conscious of himself, and of his own conduct, and of the customs and prejudices that condition it.[3]

Bernard Harrison in his essay 'Muriel Spark and Jane Austen' makes a case for considering that the peculiar difficulty, but also the pleasure, of reading Muriel Spark's novels derives from a similar refusal to construct in them an unequivocal moral universe. He states:

> Muriel Spark's technique is inherently inimical to the setting-up of a single "authorial" or "ultimate" point of view from which alone everything in the novel can ultimately be seen as cohering with everything else (that point of view in a Jane Austen novel from which we can stray only by dint of misreading or by ceasing to read the novel *as a novel*)....[4]

Like Iser, he sees the consequence of such indeterminacy as the imposition on the reader of processes of questioning and self-discovery.

In *Territorial Rights* there is no explicit judgement of the values exposed, but through scrutinizing its use of cultural texts a system of values may be discerned. The text of Venice is discussed by Malcolm Bowie in a review of *Venice Desired*; he comments on Tony Tanner's account of the special appeal Venice holds for writers:

> What all this means for Tanner is that Venice offers the literary imagination a detailed mirror-image of its own troubled inner processes. At his bidding, author after author steps forward to announce that the desire for literature and the desire for Venice are versions of the same underlying force.[5]

Bowie suggests that the cumulative effect of the city's evocations in literature may be overwhelming, dooming any individual encounter to disappointment. In *Territorial Rights* there is an indication that the architectural richness of Venice is in itself overwhelming; in a discussion about writing an art historical paper, Curran asks, 'Exactly what aspect of Venice would you undertake? I'm sure I wouldn't be able to decide if I were in your place' (p.18). Robert's reply, '...when you begin to deal with a subject, you gather as many details as possible, then you find the features general to all of them, and you develop the generalities' (p.18), could be taken as a self-referential observation; the novel does indeed start by acknowledging the most generally accepted features of Venice. However, it also introduces aspects of the city which do not feature in guide books or tourist brochures. Robert's subsequent decision to select one building to study, having come to accept that establishing the 'generalities' would require a lifetime, could also be seen as a self-referential comment; a story, too, has to start in one specific place.

Malcolm Bowie's indication that imaginative constructions of places may be more powerful and gratifying than the places themselves is in accord with the novel's representation of this idea through the character of Lina. The question, 'What have we defected for?' (p.62 and 63), which is posed by the eastern European refugees, in her case is given a clear answer: she defected for the sake of a story about Hampstead. Her imagination is said to be 'inflamed with the possibilities of western life' (p.59) as she listens to her cousin Serge's account of his experience of decadent England. To someone born in this country the images which excite her may seem banal - to have tangled hair and long skirts, to be separated from a husband, to arrange flowers and eat in restaurants - but

Lina's response to Deborah's Hampstead life invites English readers to grasp that the place in which they live may appear exotic from the outside, just as Venice does to them. However, some qualification is necessary here for already the time that has elapsed since the novel was written has established a period charm about the description; exoticism depends on some kind of gap and class, age or region as well as time may provide sufficient distance for the reader to identify with Lina's sense of strangeness in the description.

The text emphasizes how the imagination, when stirred by images of the unfamiliar, can block uncomfortable associations, savouring only those which give pleasure. This is the effect of including an account of Lina's earlier passion for Moscow, a passion based largely on the description of a dress:

> Whereupon Lina, careless of the woman's past plight, was quite carried away by the thought of the small daughter being taken to her state dancing class in a velvet dress and lace collar, in the sunny Muscovian springtime. Lina, for all her twenty years at that time, felt a heart-yearning for Moscow. (p.61)

This response ignores the rest of the woman's story which is about political repression and financial hardship; while the daughter goes to her dancing class the husband is in prison. The repetition of this idea within the novel emphasizes the selectivity in the imagination's processing of stories and its formation of romanticized abstractions.

Proust, too, shows how a sense of place is necessarily a construct which in most instances is based initially on information gleaned from secondary sources. The third part of *Du Côté de Chez Swann*, '*Noms de pays: le nom*' ('Place-names: the name' in C. K. Scott Moncrieff's translation), contains an extended meditation on the evocative power of

the names of places and their associations. This meditation includes an acknowledgement of what is false in the images constructed; for Marcel their glamour depends on distance and consequently actual encounter with a place leads to disenchantment:

> But if their names thus permanently absorbed the image that I had formed of these towns, it was only by transforming that image, by subordinating its reappearance in me to their own special laws; and in consequence of this they made it more beautiful, but at the same time more different from anything that the towns of Normandy or Tuscany could in reality be, and, by increasing the arbitrary delights of my imagination, aggravated the disenchantment that was in store for me when I set out upon my travels.[6]

Lina's disenchantment, like Marcel's, is inevitable. Both texts celebrate the pleasure of imagination, but, like *Loitering With Intent*, *Territorial Rights* dramatizes the consequences of confusing fiction-making with reality. Nevertheless, without the capacity to imagine other places and other modes of being, neither personal nor political change could be envisaged, and this too is evident in the depiction of Lina's defection.

Proust's narrator recognizes that the image we construct of unknown places is limited, confined to a few of their best known features. His response to M. Swann's account of the gothic church at Balbec, however, shows how the imagination plays on ideas of nature and art and on the past as well as the present. This capacity to imagine other modes of being is essential to an understanding of the relativity of the present and to the formation of human sympathy:

> I tried to form a picture in my mind of how those fishermen had lived, the timid and unsuspected essay towards social intercourse which they had attempted

there, clustered upon a promontory of the shores of Hell, at the foot of the cliffs of death; and gothic art seemed to me a more living thing now that, detaching it from the towns in which, until then, I had always imagined it, I could see how, in a particular instance, upon a reef of savage rocks, it had taken root and grown until it flowered in a tapering spire.[7]

The concept of its history is a crucial component of images of Venice; accounts of the city are bound to dwell on the artifice of its buildings as well as on its principal natural feature, the prevalence of water. In Proust's evocation of Venice the stress is on artifice; for him it is, 'the "School of Giorgione, the home of Titian, the most complete museum of the domestic architecture of the Middle Ages"'[8]. The visitor to a city will be moved to seek out those aspects which have already stirred the imagination, so, while previously existing ideas may be modified, they will not be entirely displaced by contact with actuality. In this respect the response to a place is like the encounter with any other text.

The generally accepted idea of 'Venice the beautiful' with its 'imperative claims' (p.5) is introduced at the beginning of the novel. It is offset against recognition of the subjective nature of response - 'he had only half a mind to feel enchanted'; the enchantment which is accepted as appropriate may not always be forthcoming. Robert is described as giving the sights he passes 'merely photographic attention' (p.5); this contrasts the passive recording of a camera with the active participation of the human imagination which is needed for a place to become more than a succession of pictures. The text comments explicitly on the subjectivity of human response:

> "Isn't it peculiar," said Mary ... "how the beauty, the great beauty, of Venice simply changes when one has some worry on one's mind. Take this morning, for

> instance, when we were looking high and low for this young man, Robert, it wasn't so enchanting as it was the other mornings when I went for walks in Venice." (p.104)

Once one ceases to play the role of tourist one ceases to have the feelings appropriate to tourism. The text acknowledges that there are people who actually live in Venice whose responses are bound to differ from those of visitors: 'to the people going to work it was a day of dull routine and bright weather, boring, cold and quite normally inconvenient' (p.24). The text extends Serge's remark, 'There is no such thing as objective judgment in London' (p.58), to a more universal application.

Although perceptions and judgements fluctuate, some ideas are accepted as historically accurate; it would generally be understood that Venice was once a wealthy state by virtue of its trading power. Its image as a cosmopolitan trading port is played on in the novel. The names of two of the most important locations in the plot, the Pensione Sophia and the Hotel Lord Byron, refer to Bulgaria and England, eastern and western Europe, connoting the significance of foreign contacts with the city. References to trade and travel are introduced which serve no other purpose than to foreground these activities; the only ostensible reason for mentioning Lina's stepfather is to tell us that he works in a 'shipping office' where he is 'a manager, international section' (p.56), and young Leo, in himself a cosmopolitan blend, works in a travel agency. Evocations of flight reinforce the idea of the transitoriness of settlement in a trading port and holiday resort. The room Lina first lives in is described as 'perched' at the top of an old decaying house, and as, 'projected like a large bird, a dangerous-looking piece of masonry, yet not dangerous presuming the bird could fly' (p.13). Lina can and does fly, establishing herself and

her stove wherever she goes, always ready to move on when her expectations are not realized. The name 'Leaver' also implies repeated departures and signifies the leaving behind of both people and places. The association of Venice with trade is reflected and reinforced by *The Merchant of Venice*, a text which would perhaps be the one most readily identified with Venice by English speakers. Like *Othello*, the play also presents the mixture, and clash, of races within the city. Such a setting is clearly well suited to the story of a group of foreign visitors who settle briefly, shift the pattern of their emotional and sexual attachments during the course of their stay, and then disperse.

The pattern of transitoriness and change is most eloquently reflected in the images of water which pervade the novel. Its opening refers to 'the sunny waters of palaces, domes and ferries' (p.5), a description which succeeds in confusing distinctions between nature and art by making everything a component of water. The insubstantiality captured here is one of the generalizations made about Venice, one which is articulated by Malcolm Bowie:

> What makes the Venetian experience so different from these other urban theatres of destruction and rebirth is that the city is there and not there at one and the same time. It rises up like a coral reef or a convoluted bank of vegetation from the waters of the lagoon and is dissolved again by the play of light and liquid.[9]

The cliché 'pearl of the Adriatic' refers to this vision of the old Venice, intersected by canals and surrounded by sea, the Venice made familiar in Britain by the paintings of Canaletto which provide a set of ready-made images of splendid canal frontages. These are the conventional images, appropriate to tourism, which Muriel Spark

exploits; she does not correct them by descriptions of mainland, industrial Venice. However, the paintings of Canaletto are in a sense the antithesis of the shifting, watery scene they depict. Paintings freeze a moment in time by the framing and fixing of the transitory, and Canaletto's method is particularly static with its hard outlines and motionless water. The movement and changeability of Venice are more suited to filmic representation and this compatability has been exploited by many directors in the twentieth century.

The relation which may exist between writing and a particular physical environment is commented on by Muriel Spark in her account of the characteristics of Emily Brontë's style. She claims that, 'her rhythms resemble the surging moorlands and her language resounds with the storm and cataract'[10]. This prompts consideration of whether there are ways in which the rhythms and language of *Territorial Rights* reflect the physical features of Venice. One of the most significant parallels is the shifting point of view. This is established early on when, having followed Robert into his bedroom at the Pensione Sofia and looked with him at the view from the window, we suddenly find ourselves standing inside the doors of the church which was visible from his window, looking back at the Pensione. The explanation follows, 'Robert had come here as soon as he had unpacked' (p.8). This is not an isolated instance of a disorientating shift where explanation follows rather than precedes the switch in location. The end of one section, 'Lina was now out of sight, but he walked on after her to her new address' is immediately followed by:

> It seemed that the trouble between the two was about the autumn leaves.
>
> Robert, watching at the garden window of his room, looked down on the neat heads of the two women. (p.10)

The technique here is akin to cinematic cutting; the camera switches to the women quarrelling, then to Robert watching at the window, then back to the women in the garden. The effect of delaying information at the micro level corresponds to the deferral of explanation within the plot as a whole. The resulting disorientations accord with the thematic structure in which we are continually expected to alter our responses to people and events, as though they are refracted through the shifting, watery world, reflecting back distorted images. In this respect, the conventional image of Venice rising out of water and dissolving into hazy insubstantiality is reflected in the novel's technique.

The language of the novel repeatedly evokes the waters of Venice: 'Violet shut out the very watery view by drawing the silvery satin curtains...' (p.67). But although it acknowledges the traditional concept of the city, that concept is frequently undercut by ironic deflation which creates a gap between the sentiments uttered and the implied author. This is evident when heightened language is used, for instance when Anthea refers to Venice as 'lush as the kings of Midian' (p.133); the inflated style here is rendered comic:

> She wanted and did not want to talk to Arnold, whoring as he was after strange gods at the Lord Byron, Venice, lush as the kings of Midian with the chains about their camels' necks ... In the heat of his lusts, thought Anthea, I will burst through to his room on the telephone. (p.133)

The hyperbolic confusion of ideas is intensified by syntactic confusion; it could be Arnold, Venice, or even the hotel which is 'lush'. The biblical language and reference, and the quotation 'after strange gods', emphasize the non-realistic inflation of style. Characteristically, Muriel Spark uses bathos to give added

weight to this, for 'on the telephone' is a pathetically inadequate conclusion to the dramatic declaration of intent. The most thoroughly conventional reference to the splendour of Venice - 'note the ineffable beauty of the dark blues and the golds' - again needs to be set in context. Grace, telephoning Anthea, tells her:

> "...I saw some mosaic pictures this afternoon. Mary Tiller and I latched on to a group so we got a guided tour. The guide was a lovely English gentleman of the old school. He brought things to your notice, like 'note the ineffable beauty of the dark blues and the golds' - ". (p.166)

The concept of the English gentleman is as out of date as his language. The nearest we have to an English gentleman among the major characters of the novel is Arnold Leaver, his status as the archetypal headmaster reflected in the name 'Arnold', but who would imagine Arnold of Rugby taking his mistress on a trip to Venice? It is not just cultural habits and expectation that have changed; the stereotyped image of Venice as a site of pleasure, both erotic and aesthetic, is challenged in this novel. And the prose style reinforces the deflation of false ideas of grandeur.

When Curran says 'It's the Byzantine Empire here' (p.113) this has more to do with elaborately convoluted schemes and intrigues than with the glories of the art of the past. The 'byzantine' plot is concerned with past crimes, with murder, spying, conspiracy, treason, the division of a corpse into two halves for separate burial, with the attempt to keep such actions secret and the attempt to expose them for profit. The Venice of back alleys, of dark canals and sinister evil, a gothic image of the city, links it to the idea of a place where nefarious deeds are easily committed and concealed. This is the city of Otway's *Venice Preserved* - one of political intrigues, of

plots hatched in secret, and of friends betrayed. It is also the image of Venice drawn on by Ann Radcliffe in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, making it a suitable place for the collusion of an unscrupulous lover with corrupt relatives who wish to force the heroine into an unwanted marriage. As Ann Radcliffe never travelled to Italy, she was necessarily reflecting a popular concept derived from texts.

The dark side of the popular conception of Venice is evoked early in *Territorial Rights*:

> After dinner they walked briskly through the chilly lanes and squares, where the side canals were ill-lit and the future beyond every few steps was murky. "Easy ..." said Curran, as practically every visitor to Venice says, sooner or later, "very easy - wouldn't it be? - to slither the knife into someone, push him into the canal and just walk on." (p.21-22)

But such a conception is another form of romanticism. There is the romance of beauty, Venice as the beautiful city which is a suitable setting for lovers, and there is the romance of evil, of what is dark, sinister, but exotic, redolent of heightened emotion of all kinds. Venice lends itself to both by the contrast between its wide canals and piazzas and its narrow alleyways and side canals overshadowed by tall buildings, a contrast paralleled in the chiaroscuro style of painting and exploited in suspense films.

The deflation of romanticism in *Territorial Rights* is extended to the sinister aspect of Venice; in this instance it is done by a prosaic emphasis on the problem of rubbish disposal, introduced in the first description of Lina, 'she bent to lift her voluminous skirt to the knees, and shook out from under it an empty mackerel-tin, a milk-carton, bits of egg-shell and some pieces of old

lettuce' (p.9). The portrayal of Lina with her full, peasant skirts and proud, swaying walk holds out promise of sexuality and fecundity, a promise which is travestied when her rounded body produces only an assortment of kitchen rubbish. Later she disposes of her rubbish less elaborately, putting it 'in the canal like other people' (p.16); not surprisingly she is treated with antibiotics after jumping into the Grand Canal and the novel insists on the filth and stench of canal water:

> At the back of the Campo di Santa Maria Formosa was a network of streets and narrow gutter-canals, at high tide smelling like dead fish and at low tide even worse. The befouled water lapped at the lower doors of the tall buildings on either side.... (p.13)

In a sense the pivot of the whole plot is a rubbish disposal problem, if a corpse can be called "rubbish", depending as it does on the burial of Victor Pancev. A further dimension is added in that it is the sisters' method of clearing up dead leaves in their garden at the Pensione Sofia that first draws attention to the strange division of that space into two. The whole treatment of the burial, while it contains elements of the macabre, is comic; the dark secrets hidden behind the glittering façades are subjected to the same comic deflation as the overblown claims of splendour.

There is, however, one passage dealing with death which accords it some solemnity. A Venetian funeral occupies an unusually sustained passage of descriptive writing which brings together many of the ideas associated with the city. The style endows it with considerable importance and it is worth quoting in full:

> A Venetian funeral is intended not to be missed. Even the motor of the barge chugs with a mournful dignity. On the tip of the prow is a gilded ball with flame-like wings, signifying who knows what pagan or civic

concept, but certainly symbolizing eternity. Next on either side of the wide black boat come two golden lions *couchant*. Then the windscreen, surmounted by vivid masses of flowers under which is posted the sombre, steady-eyed driver. Close behind the driver the men of the family stand, hatted, in dark suits. Then the coffin in the middle of the hearse, the lid covered with bright yellow and red flowers, and the wooden sides glittering with elaborate carvings. More enormous-headed flowers cover the cabin at the stern where the women mourn with black veils and white handkerchiefs. Another ball of eternal flames at the stern gives moral support to the general idea. And all this is reflected in the water beneath it: the stately merchandise and arrogance of Venetian death, as of old, when money was weighty and haste was vile. (p.84)

The observation is not attributable to any of the characters but is unmediated narratorial comment. It is one instance in the novel when Venetian citizens are seen expressing themselves, and they are seen very much from the outside; the narrator draws attention to the detached perspective by the phrase, 'signifying who knows what', and the pictorial method of description results in the reader looking on as at a tableau. A critical stance emerges through the exaggeration of such things as the size and profusion of the flowers as well as the excessive stateliness of the writing, which reflects the pompous extravagance of the funeral. Its ceremony is in marked contrast to the surreptitious interment of Victor Pancev. The importance of display is emphasized and what is displayed is not just mourning, obligatory if not sincere - the women must have their handkerchiefs ready - but wealth. Even in death the rich wish to enforce on others the idea of their pride and power, hence the '*arrogance* of Venetian death'. This passage is a reminder that the artistic splendours of Venice, so much enjoyed by

tourists, were built to display the power and wealth of both individuals and the state and are monuments to pride. The ritual positioning of the mourners on the barge is an assertion that the wealth, and the pride, are predominantly male. The death described is a very worldly one. It is significant, too, that the main survival of ancient Venetian ceremonies should be the funeral, reinforcing as it does the association of Venice with death, violent as well as natural, and with decay.

In *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* Byron laments the decay of Italy's past glories and its submission to an inevitable historical sequence:

> First Freedom, and then Glory - when that fails,
> Wealth, vice, corruption, - barbarism at last.[11]

The combination of 'wealth', 'vice' and 'corruption' has an echo in *Territorial Rights*. However, his response to the decline of Venice as a power is mixed with consolation;

> I loved her from my boyhood; she to me
> Was as a fairy city of the heart,
> Rising like water-columns from the sea,
> Of joy the sojourn, and of wealth the mart;
> And Otway, Radcliffe, Schiller, Shakspeare's art,
> Had stamp'd her image in me, and even so,
> Although I found her thus, we did not part;
> Perchance even dearer in her day of woe,
> Than when she was a boast, a marvel, and a show.[12]

His consolation derives in part from the enduring natural beauty he finds in Italy; it is clear that his pleasure is also a literary one and that, even though he regrets the lack of a successor to Tasso as a native poet, his response to Venice is informed by his response to literary texts. A further source of consolation comes from his identification with the fall from glory:

But my soul wanders; I demand it back
To meditate amongst decay, and stand
A ruin amidst ruins....[13]

Byron's poem epitomizes the romantic attraction of decay and death as well as the identification of the melancholy individual with gloomy surroundings. These are the associations with Venice which are affirmed in Thomas Mann's *Death In Venice*, perhaps one of the best known literary texts which has helped create our shared conception of the city. Mann's novel links its sordid, decaying aspects to the idea of sensuality and illicit passion. Interestingly, most of these features come together again in the more recent fictional treatment of the film *Don't Look Now*[14]. The erotic content of the film is one of its noted features, and the hero pursues his daughter's image through darkened streets and buildings in a plot based on deception. One of the film's powerful visual images is of a traditional funeral, but, in contrast to *Territorial Rights*, here the female mourner stands in a prominent position on the slowly-moving barge. When Muriel Spark in her evocation of Venice links superficial ceremony with underlying decay, eroticism with death, and pride with corruption she is clearly drawing on well-established literary and cultural conventions.

But in *Territorial Rights* affirmations of continuity co-exist with indications of change. The passage which says, 'unmarried lovers no longer chose Venice as the most desirable place to be together and, moreover, the lovers' husbands and wives no longer seemed to care if they did' (p.65), teases and confuses the reader. It asserts that there has been a break in tradition, and we are invited to accept this as an authoritative statement coming from the narrator. And yet the observation contradicts one element of the story; Arnold Leaver has indeed chosen to bring his mistress to Venice and his wife 'cares'. This double

movement of affirmation and denial is typical of the whole novel with its simultaneous evocation of tradition and insistence on change. The significance of this procedure is that it enables the text to deal with the crimes particularly associated with modern Italy while indicating that they are present day manifestations of enduring characteristics. The struggle for power and wealth is thus seen as part of the splendid city of history and also as motivating contemporary urban terrorism, kidnap and blackmail.

The stereotypical association of Italy with widespread crime and resulting political and financial uncertainty is reflected by Violet de Winter's rejection of lire as a suitable currency for the payment of blackmail - 'too traceable and too likely to be false' (p.178). The "modern" crimes of the novel continue the identification of Venice with trade. However, the form the trade takes has changed; instead of merchandise, secrets are exchanged for money. Information about individuals is valued because of the potential it creates for blackmail. Everything can be purchased in the world depicted: 'Like buying a tie, or a plane ticket to Hong Kong, one can buy information about people's fathers' (p.29). Within the framework of the novel the possession of information is not only more lucrative than petty theft, it is a way of dominating other people, and violates their privacy and autonomy far more than depriving them of some material possessions would. Spying is a recurring motif in Muriel Spark's fiction, and one which insists on a link between knowledge and power, blackmail and financial gain. In the predominantly corrupt, self-seeking world depicted no-one is sincere, unless they have nothing to exchange; the only disinterested human warmth described is that of the Ethiopian student lodger in Lina's flat who is said to give 'a grand smile such as only people who have nothing

to lose and nothing to gain can give away' (p.163). Elsewhere smiling is a suspicious activity, concealing an illicit intention or delight in criminality: '"Then you, yourself, were the actual Butcher who sliced up Pancev?" Robert said, smiling so openly and sunnily that his mother herself would have been amazed at the transformation' (p.169). In such a society, the novel implies, human warmth is all but impossible and judgements are based not on moral values but on expediency. The crucial distinctions made are not between good and evil but between the successful and the failures, the professionals and the amateurs.

The criminals in the novel acknowledge and respect a well-established hierarchy. Violet de Winter triumphs over Curran at the end because she belongs to a more powerful bunch of crooks than he. Her ascendancy is part of a larger pattern of female dominance, which runs counter to the usual concept of Italy as a place where patriarchy prevails. However, it may be seen as appropriate to the Venetian setting, for the city is traditionally construed as feminine. Malcolm Bowie refers to this aspect of the city's image:

> All Tanner's writers are men, and Venice is repeatedly figured by them as an alluring and responsive woman: an *immorata* for Henry James, a shimmering sea-nymph for Rilke, a sprawled and navigable female body for Proust.[15]

One of the dominant images of Venice in *Territorial Rights* is the church of Santa Maria Formosa, and its form as well as its name identify it as female. It is first described as a 'bulbous and comely church' (p.7), and in a parody of scholarly style and method the text underlines the importance of its name and shape:

> "...my thesis is that the name of Santa Maria Formosa originally came from the 'formosa' of the Song of

Solomon in the Bible. Original Latin: *Nigra sum sed formosa* - 'I am black but comely.' It was a prefiguration of the Madonna according to the early theologians. Now as it happens I have discovered that the ancient Hebrew could mean 'black but comely' or 'beautiful' or 'shapely' and it could also mean 'black *and* comely', or again it could mean 'black, *therefore* comely'...." (p.19)

A connection is forged between Lina and the church, underlined when Curran says, 'I should say the church might well be named merely after its own shape. ...Talking about shape, you haven't told me about the girl' (p.19). The association of 'comely' Lina, her black hair and full skirts, with Mary is ironic, for instead of a Christ-child her rounded form produces kitchen rubbish. The effect of these connections is again to borrow and at the same time undermine conventional associations; the feminine identity attributed to Venice is accepted, but at the same time the deceptiveness of appearances and the disappointment of expectations is reinforced.

The title of the novel marks an extension in the concept of trade; even the place itself may in some sense be merchandise. The kind of merchandise is made explicit when Mr B of GESS twice says 'we have no territorial rights' (p.44 and 129), meaning that his agency does not control the information rights in the area or does not have permission to deploy its agents there. In fact, it is revealed that GESS is a powerful operator in the Venice area, but holds back until there is reasonable expectation of lucrative blackmail. The word 'rights' raises the issue of who is in a position to grant them. The idea of some massive agency determining which criminals are to operate in certain areas plays on fears associated with the Mafia. Within the story rights are determined by power struggles between gangs of crooks with the biggest operators

triumphant. But the significance of the title goes beyond the references to GESS, as is made clear through Lina's frequent assertion of 'rights': 'I have residential rights' (p.53), 'it is my right to make my protest in a capitalist system' (p.90), 'I have my rights to my job and my bed and my food, or you pay me big compensation' (p.162). At first her claims seem reasonable, but her behaviour in Violet's flat transgresses the bounds of what would normally be considered acceptable and her assumption that she has the 'right' to stay there appears to be the comic misunderstanding of a foreigner; it is also a satiric exaggeration of the kind of claim frequently made through appeals to 'rights'. Here again Muriel Spark is using a strategy of defamiliarization, making the reader increasingly uncomfortable with the way in which the word 'rights' is used. This strategy raises fundamental questions about the whole concept of 'rights' and the ways in which they are legally granted and withheld in a western capitalist state. The novel seems to be asking whether the power struggles between multi-national companies are based on different premises from the power struggles between international gangs of criminals. In this respect it resembles Gay's *Beggars' Opera*, for by presenting the ethos of the criminal world as though it is "normal", it turns judgement back onto activities which the audience might unthinkingly accept. Lina's conception of capitalism and the 'rights' it is possible to claim under such a system may be more logical than ours; she at any rate has grasped that in a power struggle assertion is more likely to be successful than persuasion. The whole novel demonstrates that, in the absence of any shared moral code or agreed basis for such a code, the kind of political structure in which appeals to 'rights' are possible leads logically to the only arbiter being that of superior power.

In Italy, the Church and the Communist Party, at least when the novel was written, might have been considered power bases which could challenge the corruptions of free enterprise. A description in the novel shows their co-existence, alongside the inevitable funeral parlour:

> The church is wide and peaceful in its volume as if the front doors opened to show off the square before it, the square and all that stands around, the pharmacy, the funeral shop with its shiny coffins stacked one on top of another and carved with enthusiasm, the uneven roof-line, the Bar Dell'Orologio wherein youth and age stand eyeing each other, and, on the far left, the Communist Party's ornate and ancient headquarters with its painted façade. (p.7-8)

In a scene in which youth is contrasted with age, the Communist Party appears to be aligned with age, 'ornate and ancient', incapable of dealing with current problems. The implied inadequacy of the 'far left' is reinforced by the novel's satirical use of the clichés of left-wing language, as when Serge defends theft: 'Serge seemed to think that she might be entitled to keep the money since this would really only be an act of proletarian re-appropriation' (p.183). The justification of criminal acts by the attribution of political crimes to one's enemies is also satirized through the language used in Robert's diary: 'the fascist-bourgeois class-war of 1939-45 AD' and 'the imperialist lackey-collaborator' (p.120). Any expectation of the Catholic Church providing a more effective moral lead is resisted. There is a comic inversion of the usual criticism levelled against it when Grace says:

> "...And the last time I went to a service here in Venice there was a sermon about birth control that Leo translated for me under his breath. I don't know why the RC church doesn't stick to politics and keep its nose out of morals." (p.185)

This is an example of Muriel Spark's strategy of using a broadly comic character as an unlikely mouthpiece for a serious comment, one, moreover, which is consistent with her own stated criticism of a Papal over-emphasis on sex. The implication is that the corruption widespread in modern society stems from the inadequacy of the political structure to embody the moral values professed by the Church, and that the Church's preoccupation with private morality is at the expense of due concern with the public sphere. There is further satire on the Church through the description of the GESS offices; when Anthea first visits them she finds them like 'a pawnshop or a Roman Catholic confessional' (p.41), and in her subsequent conversation with Mr B his fatherly assumption of control, his comforting ordering of the elements of her life, and his mysteriousness are all suggestive of the priesthood. The novel thus implicates the Italian Church, State and political opposition in the failings of modern society.

But for all its references to Italian culture and Italian crime, the novel does not allow the British reader to reflect complacently that criminal activities are things that happen "abroad". One of the most curious and significant aspects of its treatment of place is the way differences between Italy and England are blurred. When the action shifts to England conventional expectations are overturned, firstly in respect of the weather: 'Outside it was beautifully sunny weather in a rare, golden October' (p.40). Then, by referring to 'the glorious street of a Birmingham suburb', the writer makes us all too aware of the discrepancy between the usual idea of a Birmingham suburb and the concept of 'glorious'. Even more peculiar is the description of Coventry: 'There were a few golden trees and the leaves lay on the pavement as if Coventry were pastoral as of old' (p.41). The archaic turn of phrase, 'as of old', reinforces the incongruity of seeing

in Coventry any trace of Arcadia. Taken in conjunction with the wet, cold and windy images given of Venice, these descriptions reverse existing stereotypes of the two countries. The veil of romance cast over England contributes to the reversal of convention when Grace says, 'It may seem far-fetched to you, Anthea, but here everything is stark realism. This is Italy' (p.127).

Our introduction to Anthea is similarly surprising. The stereotypical notion of the abandoned wife of a retired boarding school headmaster is not fulfilled by her appearance. Far from being a pitiable, dowdy figure, she is represented as formidable, 'click-clacking her heels so sharply on the pavement that nobody who walked in front of her failed to hear her coming' (p.40). The comic inversion of stereotype continues in:

> The people in front of her in the queue now pulled themselves straight and slouched no more as if anxious not to further provoke the terrorist who had clicked into position in her tweed coat, stick-like, wearing tinted glasses. (p.40)

There is apparent delight in creating the incongruous image of a middle-class, middle-aged, tweed-coated 'terrorist' standing at a suburban bus-stop. But the most important feature of this description is its transposition of the word 'terrorist' from its conventional association with contemporary Italy to the supposedly innocent victim in England. Even the 'tinted glasses' are out of place. As well as confusing cultural stereotypes, the presentation of Anthea fits in with the novel's denial of male supremacy; the philandering husband finally seems more a victim of circumstances than his wife.

While a discussion of *Territorial Rights* in terms of its implicit morality supports the contention that it obliges the reader to engage in an essentially serious endeavour,

it can distort the tone of the writing. The overall impression conveyed is of delight in the comic foibles of people. The text also conveys pleasure in capturing the inconsequentiality of human dialogue. The tension in critical theory between a focus on pleasure and on challenges to the status quo is addressed by Robert Holub in his account of the theories of Robert Jauss:

> While aesthetic experience was once considered to possess a legitimate cognitive and communicative function, more recent art and theory have stripped it of these roles and consigned pleasure to cultural attitudes associated with the narrow-minded, pretentious middle classes. ...Jauss's ambition is to challenge this tradition by restoring primary aesthetic experience to its rightful place at the center of literary theory.[16]

A consequence of the tradition so defined may be a desire to emphasize the deconstructive aspects of Muriel Spark's fiction at the expense of its pleasurable humour and its willing embrace of popular forms. However, while it is the combination of these elements in her novels which constitutes their total effect, the prevalence of strategies which unsettle fixed attitudes aligns her work with Jauss's category, 'ironic modality'; Holub explains this:

> ...the ironic modality entails disappointing, breaking, or denying an expected identification. This familiar and, in recent times, privileged interactive model is most often encountered in parody and modernist literature.[17]

The surface neutrality of the authorial stance in *Territorial Rights* plays a crucial role in its contestation of cultural stereotypes, for there is little overt attempt to correct what may be considered misapprehensions; rather, the strategy adopted is to tease the reader by the exaggeration and misapplication of

stereotypes so that the effort of correction has to come through the reading process. In the end, some of the concepts which the dominant culture would accept uncritically as well as those which it would recognize as generalizations are called into question. The readers know that blackmail, terrorism and murder, while they may be associated with Italy, all occur in Britain. But the possible implication of all of us, even those who consider themselves innocent, is raised by the suggestion that criminal activity is but one aspect of the total political and moral structure of modern, capitalist societies.

4.3 *THE TAKEOVER*

The priest of Diana at Nemi lived in perpetual fear of the assassin who would succeed in taking over his position. This is the story recounted by James G. Frazer and it is of sufficient relevance to *The Takeover* for a sizeable portion to be quoted in the text. One section that Muriel Spark omits makes an interesting comment on her enterprise:

> Accordingly, if we can show that a barbarous custom, like that of the priesthood of Nemi, has existed elsewhere; if we can detect the motives which led to its institution; if we can prove that these motives have operated widely, perhaps universally, in human society, producing in varied circumstances a variety of institutions specifically different but generically alike; if we can show, lastly, that these very motives, with some of their derivative institutions, were actually at work in Classical antiquity; then we may fairly infer that at a remoter age the same motives gave birth to the priesthood at Nemi.[1]

The complex structure of parallels between the pagan rituals of Nemi and Muriel Spark's story implies an affirmative response to the quest proposed by Frazer. It also encourages the reader to consider what the shared motives operating within both stories might be.

Hubert Mallindaine's claim to be descended from Caligula, Diana and her priest, and therefore the rightful inheritor of the priestly function, constitutes one parallel. Even though his claim is unequivocally shown to be spurious, there are similarities between his story and Frazer's account of the priests of Nemi. Ambiguity is constructed as to whether Hubert is to be seen as the priest or his usurper. Frazer paints an imaginary picture of the

priest/king walking through the dark woods in the moonlight, watching fearfully for the arrival of his slayer. The right to fight him in single combat is earned by breaking off a branch from a specific tree, identified by Frazer as the golden bough, or mistletoe, growing on an oak tree. At the end of the novel Hubert walks through the woods by Diana's temple:

> The moon was almost three-quarters full and on the wane. "Always cut wood when the moon is on the wane," an old countryman had told him during his first years at Nemi when he had gone out to gather firewood. (p.187-188)

The country lore testifies to the endurance of superstition about the goddess Diana, who is presumably more powerful when the moon waxes than when it wanes. During his walk Hubert is said to 'hack off a stout branch to help him beat his path' and it 'broke easily from the low tree' (p.188). This action identifies him with the usurper; the identification is reinforced by the ensuing encounter with Maggie, whose property he has appropriated. However, for much of the novel he is fearful that the house he occupies will be taken from him, resembling the priest in his dread of dispossession. The ambiguity of this double identification emphasizes that the priests of Nemi were all usurpers as well as usurped and that their temporary power was based on overcoming another.

The spurious claim to descent from the goddess feeds into the wider treatment of genealogy in the novel. Its significance is indicated by the prominence given to the quotation from *The First Epistle to Timothy*, which includes, 'Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith ...'[2] (p.158). The story of Hubert's ancestry is described as:

> ...fostered by a couple of dotty aunts enamoured of the authority of Sir James Frazer and misled by one of those quack genealogists who flourished in late Victorian times and around the turn of the century, and who still, when they take up the trade, never fail to flourish. (p.42)

One of the characters in *Symposium* is a genealogist, and a point is made of his honesty, in spite of the temptation, which appears to be a feature of his occupation, to 'soar into the clouds of mythology to clinch his findings' (p.61). In its account of his work the text says, 'But in the process of explaining, not much was in fact quite straightforward: there were areas of doubt' (p.62). The temptation to construct fraudulent genealogies is a product of human pride in distinguished ancestry. The falseness of this as an indication of merit or value is underlined by the fatuousness of Hubert's claim as well as by the reference to *The First Epistle to Timothy*.

Nevertheless, the suggestion in *Symposium* of doubt can be taken as a warning that relations between the past and the present are never straightforward. In *The Takeover* continuity is asserted, but on the basis of the perpetuation of human folly rather than genealogical descent. The repetition of the motif in Muriel Spark's work indicates the significance of this distinction, and the biblical quotation reinforces her consistent emphasis on basing judgements on what is manifested in action, not on claims of noble lineage, whether spurious or genuine.

The novel uses metaphor to support the idea of continuity from ancient Nemi to the contemporary world. Ancient and modern merge in the description of Switzerland:

> Maggie was in Switzerland intently but vainly hunting Coco de Renault through the woods and thickets of the Zürich banks, of the Genevan financial advisory companies, the investment counselling services of

> Berne, and through the wildwoods of Zug where the computers whirred and winked unsleepingly .... (p.138-139)

The hunt metaphor likens Maggie to Diana the huntress, and the linking of the woods of Nemi with the world of Swiss finance implies that although their institutions are 'specifically different' they may be considered 'generically alike'. The novel indicates where the similarity lies when it says of the story of the priests of Nemi, 'In the historic sense it was a pathetic and greedy affair' (p.40). The two are linked by the motive of greed, either for power or for money. Another horticultural metaphor strengthens the implied connection: 'Hubert's half-share of the sale was safely in that nursery-garden of planted money, Switzerland' (p.184). The pun on 'planted' invokes its literal meaning, but the sense this carries that money is capable of growth is denied elsewhere in the text; it is merely capable of being *trans*planted.

Money is a major concern of the novel. What it is, what it represents and what it is capable of are expounded by the narrator:

> Indeed, money of any sort is, in reality, unspendable and unwasteable; it can only pass ~~pass~~ hands wisely or unwisely, or else by means of violence, and, colourless, odourless and tasteless, it is a token for the exchange of colours, smells and savours, for food and shelter and clothing and for representations of beauty, however beauty may be defined by the person who buys it. Only in appearances does money multiply itself; in reality it multiplies the human race, so that even money lavished on funerals is not wasted, neither directly nor indirectly, since it nourishes the undertaker's children's children as the body fertilizes the earth. (p.99-100)

Whether or not this is sound economics is not an issue; what is significant is its contribution to the conception of money and of history constructed by the text as a whole. The endowing of money as a possession with false value, epitomized by the attitude of Ralph Radcliffe, 'who had money and never thought of anything else' (p.6), is set beside other false valuations, whether of genealogy or religious cults. The contrary image, of the endless circulation of money as a process of human enrichment, is linked to natural growth through the unexpected simile which concludes the passage.

The true and false valuing of money is explored through the novel's depiction of what it will and will not buy. This is treated comically when Hubert says to the priests who are his guests:

> "...give me my money's worth. Ours is a friendship based on mutual advantage and so I expect some intellectual recompense for this materially superb dinner that we are about to receive." (p.72)

His request draws attention to the intellectual paucity of all the conversations in the text, including the one which follows. Malicious gossip rather than stimulating discussion are in evidence. Again and again characters are made to represent everything as purchaseable. Pietro Bernardini reflects on his perception that his father is sleeping with the governess: 'It was thoroughly in keeping, though, that Papa was getting all full value out of Nancy Cowan, as she was from the job' (p.24). The father himself, when asked 'How do you know when you're in love?', replies, 'The traffic in the city improves and the cost of living seems to be very low' (p.34). And yet it is evident that money cannot be transferred into culture, even though it can buy objects endowed with cultural value. Maggie is shown to prize her houses, paintings and antique furniture for the financial assets they represent

rather than to prize her money for the beautiful objects it enables her to acquire. There is a comment on this system of values: 'In an access of financial morality, although it was quite unnecessary, Maggie had decided to let this house for a monthly rent to a rich businessman' (p.6). The idea that the getting of money constitutes 'morality', a concept central to the protestant, capitalist emphasis on saving and investing, is challenged by the morality of the text with its emphasis on the spending, or circulating, of wealth.

In one respect at least a positive value is placed on the association of money with beauty. The impact of Maggie's physical presence is, like Hilda Damien's in *Symposium*, a product of her wealth. In both cases the text lingers with loving emphasis on details of their purchased physical attributes; on her introduction Maggie is described as:

> overdressed very tastefully, with a mainly-white patterned dress brilliant against her shiny sun-tan. Her hair was silver-tipped, her eyes large and bright. She had a flood-lit look up to the teeth. (p.30)

Her depiction is appropriate to the jet-setting milieu she inhabits, and also reflects the especial concern in Italy with fashion and stylishness. A guidebook to Tuscany published in 1992 advises the foreign visitor, 'Italians are fond of good clothes and in general are very conscious of their appearance. ...Shorts are acceptable, though designer versions find more favour'[3]. Although this may strike the reader as unintentionally comic in its expression, it draws attention to Italian interest in high fashion. The displacement of the image of fat Italian matrons is reinforced in the novel by the account of Lauro's future in-laws: '...a good-looking, long-legged set, modern and, with the exception of his fiancée, slender. His future mother-in-law had a fine tanned face and streaked, short hair...' (p.130). Lauro is made to

scrutinize them anxiously to see if their style matches that of the wealthy class he has lived among. In this world where style counts for everything it is said of Maggie, 'If your style wavers she takes immediate advantage of it and walks all over you' (p.126), and a thief betrays himself to the discerning servant by a want of style when he spills *ragoût* on his trousers. To accept style as the final arbiter is to collapse certain distinctions - '"But what is opulence," said Hubert, "but a semblance of opulence? ...Appearances *are* reality"' (p.72).

The concern with beautiful, well cared for bodies is manifested in a scene depicting Maggie and Mary lying in the sun and creaming themselves with lotion. The recurring insistence on suntans leads to a metaphoric connection between golden skin and golden money. The associations cluster around Maggie: '...her glowing and wealthy presence...' (p.102); '...glowing and handsome' (p.172); '...reassuringly radiant...' (p.173); '...still handsome and gleaming...' (p.181); but perhaps the most significant of these images is, '...like a brown statue in her gleaming white two-piece bathing suit' (p.115). The repetitions of white and gold evoke imperial splendour, whereas the word 'statue' suggests an identification with statues of Diana, the fertility of the goddess mirrored in Maggie's sun-soaked opulence.

A connection between gold flesh, gold wealth and physical desire is made explicit: 'The sight of so much golden money in the rich, very rich, tall girl's hands inflamed him instantly with sexual desire' (p.47). While this may appear a 'pathetic and greedy' misidentification, the clustering of images is of long standing. Frazer gives an account of the association of ideas which may have led to the endowing of mistletoe with magical properties: 'The

yellow colour of the withered bough may partly explain why the mistletoe has been sometimes supposed to possess the property of disclosing treasures in the earth'[4]. The riches produced by the benevolent actions of the sun are identified with the riches represented by gold, and both are in some way connected with Diana, who is, despite the apparent contradiction, associated with fertility as well as chastity; Frazer's description of her includes:

> ...goddess of woodlands and of wild creatures, probably also of domestic cattle and of the fruits of the earth ... believed to bless men and women with offspring and to aid mothers in childbed ... her holy fire, tended by chaste virgins, burned perpetually in a round temple within the precinct ... associated with her was a water-nymph Egeria ....[5]

The modern day females who surround the temple of Diana in *The Takeover* are mostly neither chaste nor fertile, but practise a sterile sexuality. Just as they cannot fully enjoy the products of their financial wealth, they cannot enjoy their own potential fecundity.

The clustering of associations around pagan divinities produces the curious contradictions in the attributes of Diana. Her identification with the natural world of woodland and with women leads to the association with fertility, and this is at odds with her attributes as goddess of the cold moon and chastity, and with her representation as a fierce huntress. The multiple associations which have to be teased out are reflected by the operation of clustering associations within the novel. There is a further indication of the confusions surrounding the symbolic identifications of sun and moon in Plato's *Symposium* when Aristophanes gives a comic account of human sexuality:

> The reason for the existence of three sexes and for their being of such a nature is that originally the

> male sprang from the sun and the female from the earth, while the sex which was both male and female came from the moon, which partakes of the nature of both sun and earth.[6]

The novel seems closer to this explanation than to the more usual identification of the moon as female. Lauro's indiscriminate coupling with any age and sex reads as a play on the sexuality associated by Aristophanes with the moon. But the more positive aspects of Diana are also invoked by the novel. Its conclusion, which is almost a blessing, quotes from Frazer: '...so bright was the moon, three-quarters full, illuminating the lush lakeside and, in the fields beyond, the kindly fruits of the earth' (p.190). But as so often in this text, the positive image has its negative counterpart: '...I read in the papers that the Lake of Nemi is "biologically dead"' (p.183). The aridity of humans, whose actions destroy natural life, is contrasted with the lushness of the earth and its vegetation.

Landscape serves to expose human folly in another context. Fashionable responses to it are ridiculed through a ludicrous use of jargon. Father Gerard Harvey, with his interest in 'ecological paganism' (p.11) is a broad target for satire. There is delight in the construction of exaggerated language, as well as in its deflation:

> The younger priest sipped his drink and looked out over the still lake in its deep crater and the thick wildwood of Nemi's fertile soil. "Terrific ecology!" he said.
>
> "You mean the view?" Pauline said. (p.13)

The impression that the natural world counters in its still endurance the changing fads and fashions of humans is strengthened by two brief references to Wordsworth made early in the text. Their only function appears to be to evoke the seriousness of his thoughts about the natural

world as a contrast to the priest's triviality. The quotation from Byron included in the text also stresses the endurance of the physical world; the words, 'A deep cold settled aspect nought can shake'' (p.22) sets the coldness of the moon and the water, which are here associated with hatred, against the dominant images of warmth and sunlight, adding to the pattern of double images. Although the novel ridicules fashionable references to ecology, they are made to serve a more significant purpose; the statement, 'The Church continues to absorb many pagan nature-rituals because the Church is ecology-conscious' (p.75) fulfils several functions, but in context the most important is its reminder that Christianity survived through taking over pre-existing beliefs and rituals. This reinforces the idea that change and adaptation are necessary to survival, an idea which emerges in different ways within the text.

Negative connotations of wealth and the 'pathetic' as well as 'greedy' desire for money as an end in itself are reinforced by the rich characters' lack of friendship, peace of mind and enjoyment of their possesssions. Emilio asks Berto, 'These days, whom can you trust?' (p.143), and the actions in the novel vindicate the doubt expressed. Ownership of jewellery which is too valuable to insure is depicted as an anxiety, not a pleasure; it has to be deposited in bank vaults and fake copies made for the owners' use. The choice seems to be to display wealth and become a target for thieves and swindlers, or to conceal and hence not enjoy it. The depositing of valuable possessions in bank vaults may be compared with making votive offerings to the pagan gods. The parallel is suggested by the description of Mary's safety-box, 'one of those set high in the wall of the bank-vault' (p.177), and Diana's temple at Nemi with its 'long wall of high arched niches, once part of the temple life' (p.42). Sites sacred

to the worship of money and the worship of Diana can both be desecrated. When Mary hears of the robbery from vaults at her bank, 'she spoke with awe as if she was in church' (p.171), and contemporary offerings at the Nemi temple site are sordid:

> There was a rubbish dump, incredibly rubbishy with the backs of yellow plastic chairs, petrol tins, muddy boots and cast-off rags piled up in those enormous Roman votive alcoves which soared above their desecration with stony dignity. (p.42)

Significantly, noble artefacts are said to retain their 'dignity'; the beauty of what can be purchased is not denied, only the false valuing of the means rather than the end.

The depiction of similarities between the system of values in the ancient and modern worlds is reinforced by reference to *The Acts of the Apostles*. The passage quoted tells of the opposition to Christianity by the silversmiths of Ephesus, 'which made silver shrines for Diana', an occupation which 'brought no small gain to the craftsmen'[8] (p.160). The purpose of the quotation is left in no doubt:

> "I want to say," said Nancy, "that the biblical passage you have heard is a condemnation of the pagan goddess Diana. It implies that the cult of Diana was only a silversmith's lobby and pure commercialism. Christianity was supposed to put an end to all that, but it hasn't. ..." (p.161)

The concluding words stress the continuity of commercial values, joyfully embraced by Hubert when he finds gold coins in his teapot: 'Render unto Caesar the thing's that are Caesar's and I wonder, thought Hubert, what utterly charming gentleman hath rendered these things unto me?' (p.52). The meaning of the bibilical reference is ironically reversed, it being, for Herbert, more blessed

to receive than to give. But tranquil enjoyment of the outside world is depicted as possible only when the anxiety of protecting possessions is lifted: '"One good thing," said Herbert, "about having nothing left to protect is that I can go for a walk"' (p.186). Maggie, too, is represented as more calm and charming when dressed in drab, second-hand clothes, 'a symbol of my new poverty' (p.189). However, her satisfaction comes partly from exacting revenge and retrieving her fortune. The lesson seems to be that it is possible to remain fabulously[5] wealthy only by becoming a criminal, which is another way of accepting the necessity for money to circulate, this time from one crook to another. The only expression of trust comes with this recognition, 'There are times when one can trust a crook' (p.190), but the basis for trust is the hold over another given by the possession of incrimating evidence, a form of blackmail.

The transfer of money from the hands of one criminal to another is one form of takeover. The novel depicts this at an individual level, but refers as well to takeovers on an international scale. The application of a term derived from business dealings to theft, and also to the taking over of sexual partners, implies that corrupt commercial values permeate all aspects of life. Political change, too, is represented in terms of the taking over of goods as well as power. The reported swing to the political left in Italian elections fills Berto with alarm, but Emilio comments, 'After the capitalists have finished with us I doubt if there will be anything left for the Communists to take over' (p.144); his even-handed criticism is endorsed by the rest of the text. The theme of takeovers is linked to the history of Italy through the character of Letizia and her complaint, 'Here in Italy the foreigner takes everything' (p.26); this is a reminder of the successive invasions of Italy and the removing of its works of art to

foreign destinations. The continuing removal of previously buried treasures, despite government efforts to safeguard them, is touched on in a lunchtime conversation: '"The Belle Arti will stop everything," said Cousin Viola. "They'll take it for the nation and someone will steal it and smuggle it abroad"' (p.120-121).

The inclusion of religion in the succession of takeovers is supported by the quotation from *The Acts of the Apostles* with its reference to the displacement of pagan cults by Christianity. The novel shows that, in turn, the Christian Church has split into rival factions with charismatic movements burgeoning. There is broad humour in the treatment of religious fashions and of Hubert's claims for the precedence of his cult:

> Studying their ecstatic forms of worship and their brotherly claims it seemed to him quite plain that the leaders of these multitudes were encroaching on his territory. He felt a burning urge to bring to the notice of these revivalist enthusiasts who proliferated in Italy during Holy Year that they were nothing but schismatics from the true and original pagan cult of Diana. (p.147)

As so often in Muriel Spark's writing, an evidently fallacious claim conceals a valid one, for the insistence on continuity of human motivation supports the idea that those who flock to new sects are the natural descendants of the adherents of old ones. The novel includes an even more complex argument about continuity and change within religious observances:

> "To us," said Hubert, "who are descended from the ancient gods, your Christianity is simply a passing phase. To us, even the God of the Old Testament is a complete upstart and his Son was merely a popular divergence. Diana the huntress, the goddess of nature, and ultimately of fertility, lives on. If you poison

> her rivers and her trees she takes her revenge in a perfectly logical way. (p.76-77)

Although it appears that this is meant to be outrageous, some of what he says is supported by the rest of the text; it implies that while he may be in error in identifying natural forces with mythological names, the natural forces themselves and the explanatory function of mythology transcend those names.

Changes in religion are brought together in the novel with changes in the sphere of high finance. Ruth Whittaker comments that in *The Takeover*, 'the characters are strongly under pressure from the economic and political changes in the wider world'[9]. Her emphasis on its engagement in current world affairs is endorsed by Norman Page, who notes, 'It is very much a contemporary Italy, and the time scheme in *The Takeover* is highly specific'[10]. The language used in dealing with world political events captures the detached perspective associated with history books: 'The war of 1973 in the Middle East was just coming to an end. Things would never be the same again...' (p.82). The phrase, 'the passing of an era' is repeated: 'The morning news had announced the death of Noël Coward, calling it "the passing of an era"' (p.9); 'He had just read in the newspaper of 15 February that year that Julian Huxley and P. G. Wodehouse were dead: "The passing of an era ..." the newspapers had commented' (p.110); the trivialization of the newspapers is subjected to irony, but nevertheless the novel gives its own account of the inauguration of something new in 1973, 'a change in the meaning of property and money' (p.90). It uses heightened language in describing this change:

> But it did not occur to one of those spririted and in various ways intelligent people round Berto's table that a complete mutation of our means of nourishment had already come into being where the concept of money

and property were concerned, a complete mutation not merely to be defined as a collapse of the capitalist system, or a global recession, but such a sea-change in the nature of reality as could not have been envisaged by Karl Marx or Sigmund Freud. Such a mutation that what were assets were to be liabilities and no armed guards could be found and fed sufficient to guard those armed guards who failed to protect the properties they guarded, whether hoarded in banks or built on confined territories, whether they were priceless works of art, or merely hieroglyphics registered in the computers. (p.91)

Events in the story show the working out of these ideas through its indication that wealth is no longer a source of pleasure but a liability. There is an implied link between the panic induced by changes in the sphere of international finance and the flourishing of new religious sects:

> A little over a year had passed since the Middle East war of 1973, and Hubert was fairly flourishing on the ensuing crisis. He had founded a church. It cultivated the worship of Diana according to its final phases when Christianity began to overcast her image with Mary the Mother of God. It was the late Diana and the early Mary that Hubert now preached, and since the oil trauma had inaugurated the Dark Ages II he had acquired a following of a rich variety and ever more full of numbers. (p.99)

The exaggeration of the language here alerts us to a gap between the attitude of the implied author and the notion of catastrophe. The passing of eras referred to in the text - 'Eras pass, thought Hubert. They pass every day. He felt dejected. He cheered up. Then he felt dejected again.' (p.10) - can be conceived of as endings, causing dejection, or as phases in an endless process of change no more to be grieved over than welcomed, merely accepted.

The refusal to consider the killing of the priest at Nemi 'tragic' constitutes a rejection of the concept of change as catastrophic. The word 'tragedy' is used by Frazer and the novel comments, 'This tragedy was only so in the classical and dramatic sense; its participants were in perfect collusion' (p.40). It stresses the playing of roles in a preordained ritual, making the obvious, if not always fully acknowledged, point that anyone attempting to become the priest of Nemi knows from the start that he will be killed in turn. The parallels indicated in the novel extend this argument to any seizing of power or possessions, denying pity to those who lose what they have gained. It is in this respect that it corresponds to Bakhtin's definition of the carnivalistic: 'The basis of the ritual performance of crowning and discrowning the king is the very core of the carnivalistic attitude to the world...'[11]. He links this to '*the pathos of vicissitudes and changes, of death and renewal...*' and to 'the *jolly relativity* of every system of order, every authority and every (hierarchical) position'. The doubleness which we have already identified within the novel is emphasized by Bakhtin: 'All carnivalistic symbols are of this nature: they always include within themselves the perspective of negation (death), or its opposite'[12]. The representation in *The Takeover* of continuous processes of change, of the assumption and loss of positions, of the deprivation and restoration of fortunes, all these features align it with his concept of the carnivalistic.

The identification is strengthened by further similarities between the novel and Bakhtin's definitions. The list he provides of what he terms 'various secondary rituals of carnival' is of interest in the light it sheds on some of the actions:

> ...disguise, for example, ie the carnivalistic changing of clothing, positions, and destinies in life, or the

> carnivalistic mystifications, the bloodless carnival wars, the verbal agons and cursing matches, the exchanges of gifts (abundance as an aspect of carnivalistic utopia) ....[13]

Maggie's adoption of disguise, her generosity, and the fighting which breaks out at the 'gathering of Hubert's faithful' (p.152) all conform to these listed characteristics. The reference to 'cursing matches' is particularly interesting and is related to Bakhtin's discussion of Menippean satire:

> Characteristic of the menippea are scandalous scenes and scenes of eccentric behaviour, incongruous speeches and performances, ie all violations of the generally accepted, ordinary course of events and of the established norms of behaviour and etiquette, including the verbal.[14]

This account helps explain the purpose and effect of the episodes in the novel involving Hubert, Pauline and the Jesuit priests. They are characterized by violations of the expected priestly behaviour and rudeness of various kinds. After eating dinner with Hubert and Pauline, the priests are described as 'greatly cheered by the wine and liqueurs, the pleasant food, the physical prettiness of the evening and Hubert's exciting insults' (p.77). The excitement attached to insults forms part of the pleasure experienced in the temporary abandonment of rules and propriety which contributes to the enjoyment of carnival.

Not everyone relishes carnival; the insults and disguises can offend and irritate certain sensibilities. Goethe, as a man who thought of himself as "serious", recorded on 21 February 1787:

> At last the folly is over. Yesterday evening the innumerable little candles created another scene of Bedlam. One has to see the Roman Carnival to lose all wish ever to see it again![15]

And yet, after his return to Rome in the following year he gives a full account of the carnival and his reaction is more mixed. The animated interest of the account itself is at odds with some of his more dismissive comments, and he concludes:

> ...let me remark that the most lively and exquisite delights are like horses racing past, the experience of an instant only, which leaves scarcely a trace on our soul; that liberty and equality can be enjoyed only in the intoxication of madness, and desire reaches its highest pitch of excitement only in the presence of danger and the voluptuous half sweet, half uneasy sensations which it arouses.[16]

The concept that carnival temporarily destroys hierarchies is central to the importance accorded it by Bakhtin. He explores the political significance only hinted at in Goethe's reference to 'liberty and equality' when he describes carnival as:

> an attitude toward the world which liberates from fear, brings the world close to man and man close to his fellow man (all is drawn into the zone of liberated familiar contact), and, with its joy of change and its jolly relativity, counteracts the gloomy, one-sided official seriousness which is born of fear, is dogmatic and inimical to evolution and change, seeks to absolutize the given conditions of existence and the social order.[17]

Just as there are those who see carnival as frivolous and trivial, there are readers who see no serious purpose in the humour of Muriel Spark's novels. The correspondences between her text and Bakhtin's analysis suggest otherwise, and indicate another reason for giving an Italian setting, with its associations of Roman Saturnalia, to this carnivalistic story.

Christopher Norris in *Deconstruction: theory and practice* discusses another challenge to conventional concepts of "seriousness". He traces connections between the emphasis on rhetoric and metaphor in theories of deconstruction and the pre-Socratic philosophers, 'those shadowy figures whom Nietzsche admired for having the courage of their own metaphors'[18]. He goes on to say:

> Their "explanations" were of course a species of poetic analogy, and yield small sense to the rational (or post-Socratic) mind. But, as Phaedrus declares, "everything is analogy", including the presumptive generalizations involved in dialectical argument. The difference is that the dialectician, unlike his "irrational" precursor, fails to recognize this operative movement in the process of thought itself.

The use of literature as a vehicle for ideas acknowledges rhetoric and metaphor as appropriate tools. And there is a more specific recognition of different modes of argument in the views of Muriel Spark recorded by Frank Kermode:

> There is metaphorical truth and moral truth, and what they call anagogical, you know, the different sorts of truth; and there is absolute truth, in which I believe things which are difficult to believe, but I believe them because they are absolute.[19]

This is part of her attempt to explain her perception of the relation between the 'pack of lies' which she constructs in her stories and the concept of 'truth' which is her underlying concern. What she refers to as lies are the invented characters and actions which, in her fiction, have a metaphorical or allegorical relation to what may be conceived of as reality.

The seriousness of carnival is strongly advocated by Julia Kristeva. She refers to Bakhtin and what she terms his emphasis on the 'murderous, cynical, and revolutionary' aspects of the "carnivalesque", and goes on to argue that,

'The laughter of the carnival is not simply parodic; it is no more comic than tragic; it is both at once, one might say that it is *serious*'[20]. She seems to deny that comedy on its own can be 'serious', a view that is not shared by Judy Little. She, too, draws on Bakhtin's theories and, in her discussion of Muriel Spark as a comic writer, suggests ways in which his concept of the carnivalistic is compatible with a feminist agenda:

> While feminist comedy is not the same as feminist political action, it is not surprising that feminist comedy would use for its imagery the "holiday" actions which have sometimes historically emerged into the everyday, into political action, into revolutionary movements that could envision the possibility of a new world.[21]

Comedy is particularly suited to advocacy for political change because of its ability to disarm criticism. Jerry Palmer says, 'only one feature of jokes and jests, of all forms of comic utterance, is universal in them and distinguishes them from non-comic utterances: the subversion of the inhibition of criticism'[22]. Comedy is of especial benefit in relation to feminism for it evades accusations of stridency and is hard to ridicule. Bakhtin's argument that carnival is inimical to established authority aligns it with feminist challenges to patriarchy. In her identification of *The Takeover* as carnivalistic, Judy Little says, 'Instead of the quest, the major narrative metaphor becomes the party, the holiday, the celebration of an overthrow'[23]. Quests are goal oriented whereas this novel emphasizes cyclic patterns, turning what might have been conceived as tragedy into comedy.

The novel's comic vision is not optimistic about humanity but its historical perspective refuses the nostalgic option of supposing that in the past people were better.

References to the past stress repetition: 'Has any one of you read Homer? Worse things than this occurred to the gods and their descendants in those days, and so it isn't surprising if they happen to me in times like these' (p.166). The concern with evil, which in Muriel Spark's work is combined with comedy, is explored by Frances Russell Hart in his essay, 'Ridiculous demons'. He relates her concept of demons to the article on Proust, arguing that the 'ghosts and demons' of her writing are part of a 'struggle between two materialisms and two kinds of materializers'[24]. He sees the characters in *The Takeover* as deceived into the wrong kind of materialism, mistaking abstractions for reality. The novel's satirical treatment of the value placed on money and on the materializations which feature in the religious cults depicted supports his analysis. He explains what he sees as the strategies available to the novelist in attempting to counter such misconceptions:

> The countervision to demonology is sacramentalism, which affirms the oneness of spiritual and material, of sacred and profane. Sacramentalism mediates by the power of grace and transfiguration. Such is the positive corrective. The negative way is by ridicule, satiric exposure, whereby demonic apparitions are shown to be unreal and are made to disappear. ...Thus, the novelist must traffic in "ghouls of the air", practise a kind of demonology, summon up apparitions to fight apparitions.[25]

While the weight in this novel may fall on the side of satire and ridicule, there is a remarkable passage which is affirmative. It is one of those passages which stand out from the rest by virtue of their lyricism; the unusually sustained sentence it contains indicates the importance it carries but, as so often in Muriel Spark's writing, its solemnity is mitigated by the framing context:

> The two women were greeted occasionally by busy shopkeepers who passed by and swept a glance, along with their smiles, at Agata's hard-done-by belly of shame, while the whole of eternal life carried on regardless, invisible and implacable, this being what no skinny craving cat with its gleaming eyes by night had ever pounced upon, no tender mole of the earth in the hills above had ever discovered down there under the damp soil, no lucky spider had caught, nor the white flocks of little clouds could reveal when they separated continually, eternal life untraceable and persistent, that not even the excavators, long-dead, who dug up the fields of Diana's sanctuary had found; they had taken away the statues and effigies, the votive offerings to the goddess of fertility, terracotta replicas of private parts and public parts, but eternal life had never been shipped off with the loot; and even the lizard on the cliff-rocks in its jerky fits had never been startled by the shadow or motion of that eternal life which remained, past all accounting, while Clara and Agata chattered on, tremendously blocking everyone's path although no one cared in the slightest that they did so. (p.129)

This is a rare instance in her writing of the affirmation of the non-material, and yet it is done through a remarkable series of evocations of the natural world. The contrast is explicit between the "graven images" of Diana's temple and the spiritual which does not inhere in them. The power of the rhetoric places value on 'eternal life' both as abstract spirituality and as the enduring activity of non-human existence. Implicit, too, is the association of Agata with the continuation of life. This suggests a positive attitude towards pregnancy and the fertility associated with Diana. The novel's insistence on continuity within change here resolves contrasts between pagan and Christian, indicating that beneath superficial

differences lies the principle of 'eternal life'. In such a schema, takeovers may change surface patterns, but beneath these changes is something that endures.

CHAPTER FIVE: GENRE CONVENTIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The concept of genre is necessarily intertextual, and in this instance definition is based on comparison between texts of the same kind. However, it is important not to see definition as an end in itself; Jonathan Culler's stricture on mere taxonomy, referred to in relation to *Loitering With Intent*, is echoed by Northrop Frye:

> The purpose of criticism by genres is not so much to classify as to clarify such traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there was no context established for them.[1]

Studying the use made of pre-existing genres in Muriel Spark's novels is one way 'to explore the mechanisms or structures by which they function and thus to illumine general propositions about literature'[2], thereby conforming to the practice advocated by Culler. The idea that this is a function that the study of genres may usefully serve is also advanced by Todorov in 'The origin of genres':

> As we know, any class of objects may be converted into a series of properties by a passage from extension to comprehension. The study of genres, which has as its starting point the historical evidence of the existence of genres, must have as its ultimate objective precisely the establishment of those properties.[3]

This marks a change from the position adopted in his earlier work on genre, *The Fantastic*, where he opposed structuralist theory to historical criticism and explained that his project was concerned with the former: 'Without studying any particular work in detail, we have instead

tried to elaborate a general framework in which precisely such concrete studies might take their place'[4].

The desirability of combining structuralism and historical criticism in the study of genres is accepted by Frederic Jameson. He argues that both the diachronic and the synchronic dimensions are important, and that they are, 'usefully reidentified in the current concept of intertextuality, in which a diachronic sequence finds its proper use in the projection of a stereoptic vision of an individual text'[5]. This leads him to reject a study of the formation and development of individual genres in favour of attending to the way existing genres are combined and modified in specific, historically produced texts:

> This notion of the text as a synchronic unity of structurally contradictory or heterogeneous elements, generic patterns and discourses ... now suggests that even Frye's notion of displacement can be rewritten as a conflict between the older deep-structural form and the contemporary materials and generic systems in which it seeks to inscribe and reassert itself. Beyond this, it would seem to follow that, properly used, genre theory must always in one way or another project a model of the coexistence or tension between several generic modes or strands....[6]

His emphasis on transformation and variety, an emphasis shared by other writers on genre, is helpful in relation to Muriel Spark's novels, which do not fit comfortably inside pre-existing genres. Todorov goes so far as to exclude from 'the right to figure in the history of literature' texts that do not change our conception of the activity of literature itself, relegating them to 'another category: that of so-called "popular" or "mass" literature'[7].

Muriel Spark has been criticized for the delight in "popular" literary forms evident in her fiction. Patrick Parrinder in an essay on 'Muriel Spark and her critics' argues that she has been undeservedly fortunate in receiving favourable notice from distinguished critics. One of his grounds for considering this undeserved is her relish of 'the fantasy, the gothic, and the thriller', which he terms 'sub-genres'[8]. His essay raises several questions: are the genres he cites important in Muriel Spark's novels? if so, how do they function? are other genres equally or more important? and what is the propriety of the concept of a "sub-genre"? In an attempt to find some answers I will first consider his terminology.

An explanation of the confusion which necessitated the coining of the word "sub-genre" is provided by Helen Carr:

> The word genre, of course, has two very different sets of associations. Often it's now used in the context of popular literature, where it frequently implies "not literature", but rather some low-level formulaic production. But its older use is by formalist academic literary critics, for whom it means established literary forms such as the epic, tragedy, comedy, realist novel and so on.[9]

Formulaic productions can be seen to conflict with the Romantic desire for originality, but, as Helen Carr goes on to state:

> ...now once again we are aware of the importance of genre, not as a set of rules that ought to be followed, but as a framework that is always there to some degree. All texts are dependent on and grow out of other texts.

Acceptance of this proposition has placed emphasis on the way texts interact and on the variations that are made possible because of the existence of established models. It does not, however, necessarily lead to a positive

valuation of formulaic stories, particularly if they follow rather than break rules.

It is clear from the work of some Marxist critics that their dislike of formulaic stories has a political motivation. The problem for a critic such as Jameson is that while he favours the idea of oppositional art produced by the masses he condemns the art they consume. He justifies this on the grounds that art manufactured by those in power exploits the masses and forms part of the 'gradual penetration of a market system and a money economy'[10]. Recent criticism, strengthened by feminist opposition to dismissing certain forms of mass consumption as exploitation of naive women, has explored the subversive possibilities of formulaic texts and their consumption. But although this reduces the likelihood of condemning a writer for enjoying sub-genres, the grounds of debate are political and moral rather than formal and aesthetic. It is not my intention to join this debate; instead I will focus on the effects achieved by the adaptation of specific genres without making a priori judgements about the relative virtue of different kinds of writing.

The exploration in this chapter of genre relations in Muriel Spark's texts will concentrate on the use of crime fiction in *The Driver's Seat* and gothic in *Not To Disturb*. It will not, however, be considering an individual text in relation to fantasy, the third category referred to by Patrick Parrinder, because I am persuaded that it is not a genre, nor even a sub-genre. The debate about the validity of defining fantasy as a genre was initiated by Todorov's seminal study of the fantastic. Rosemary Jackson disputed his definition, stating a preference for the concept of 'mode': 'It is perhaps more helpful to define the fantastic as a literary *mode* rather than a genre, and to

place it between the opposite modes of the marvellous and the mimetic'[11]. Kathryn Hume took issue with both of them, and her use of the word "fantasy" as opposed to "the fantastic" is consistent with her definition:

> Whereas other critics writing on fantasy try to identify it as a genre or mode, I have tried *not* to isolate fantasy from the rest of literature. It is truer to literary practice to admit that fantasy is not a separate or indeed a separable strain, but rather an impulse as significant as the mimetic impulse, and to recognise that both are involved in the creation of most literature.[12]

This formulation fits both the significance and the operation of fantasy in Muriel Spark's novels. The prevalence of occurrences which cannot be given a realistic explanation is one of their most unsettling features. In some of her early novels, notably *Memento Mori*, *The Ballad of Peckham Rye* and *The Bachelors*, it is combined with a realistic evocation of humdrum lives in an unremarkable setting. It is the combination of fantasy and mimesis, heightening the contrast between the safely predictable and the uncanny, that constitutes their main challenge to readers' preconceptions. The novels I will be considering in this chapter represent a more thoroughgoing 'departure from consensus reality'[13], Kathryn Hume's definition of fantasy. And the connection between fantasy and gothic is well established, as is evident in Rosemary Jackson's study. In agreeing with Hume that fantasy is an element rather than a mode or genre, I am therefore asserting rather than denying its importance in the impact achieved by Muriel Spark's fiction.

5.2 *THE DRIVER'S SEAT*

In *Reading by Numbers: Contemporary Publishing and Popular Fiction* Ken Worpole writes:

> The crime novel is one of the few popular literary forms that goes beyond the surface truth of things in order to find some deeper meaning. And although, as with all literature, it invites the reader to enter into the labyrinth of human and social affairs, it is one of the few literary forms that offers the reader some way out at the end.[1]

It is because they are susceptible of interpretation at a level of 'deeper meaning' that detective stories have received so much attention from critics and theorists. The 'way out' they offer at the end is, traditionally, knowledge, making them a peculiarly cerebral form of popular entertainment, which no doubt enhances their appeal for the commentators. They can be seen, too, as modern, secular quest stories because of their emphasis on the goal which will finally be reached. Critical studies of the genre show that the conventions which operate are readily defined and understood. The general acceptance that in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* Agatha Christie "cheated" indicates a strong measure of agreement about the rules of the game. There is, however, confusion of terminology for commentaries vary in their use of 'crime story', 'thriller' and 'detective story'. My preference is for using 'detective story' when there is a mystery relating to the perpetrator of a crime and the mystery is solved by a detective, and 'thriller' when the hero or heroine is threatened by an adversary or adversaries and the interest centres on how he or she outwits them. In thrillers the action is usually more rapid and the plot more convoluted, though, paradoxically, less cerebral. I

would use 'crime novel' or 'crime fiction'[2] as a term covering both.

It is significant that when Muriel Spark first tested out the possibilities of the novel form by writing *The Comforters*, with some reluctance evidently - 'I think of verse as the best way of saying things; the short story as the next best, and the novel as a rather lazy and third-rate form'[3] - she drew upon the conventions of crime fiction. The interest in crime recurs throughout her novel writing, but *The Driver's Seat* foregrounds its references to the formulas of the detective story and plays with them in a particularly sustained and disturbing way. One of its most subversive features is the element of fantasy; Tzvetan Todorov agrees with S.S.Van Dine's rule that in detective fiction, 'Everything must be explained rationally; the fantastic is not admitted'[4]. An exploration of the departures from convention which are characteristic of *The Driver's Seat* is revealing both of the conventions themselves and the effectiveness of their disruption.

A link between literary conventions and cultural contexts is affirmed by John Cawelti in *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance*. His analysis also amplifies the distinction between a formula and a genre given by Helen Carr:

> The concept of a formula as I have defined it is a means of generalizing the characteristics of large groups of individual works from certain combinations of cultural materials and archetypal story patterns. It is useful primarily as a means of making historical and cultural inferences about the collective fantasies shared by large groups of people and of identifying differences in these fantasies from one culture or period to another. When we turn from the cultural or historical use of the concept of formula to a

> consideration of the artistic limitations and possibilities of particular formulaic patterns, we are treating these formulas as a basis for aesthetic judgments of various sorts. In these cases, we might say that our generalized definition of a formula has become a conception of a genre.[5]

The usefulness of his distinction is that it can help to focus on both the specifically literary reference entailed by using a certain genre, and on the wider cultural significance of the formulas. The distinction he goes on to make between a formula-genre and an archetype-genre is particularly pertinent to an exploration of Muriel Spark's novels:

> Because the conception of genre involves an aesthetic approach to literary structures, it can be conceived either in terms of the specific formulas of a particular culture or in relation to larger, more universal literary archetypes: there are times when we might wish to evaluate a particular western in relation to other westerns. In this case we would be using a conception of a formula-genre, or what is sometimes more vaguely called a popular genre. We might also wish to relate this same western to some more universal generic conception such as tragedy or romance. Here we would be employing an archetype-genre.[6]

Muriel Spark's novels never belong to a specific formula-genre, although they make extensive use of such genres. They do, however, correspond to the archetype-genres as defined by Northrop Frye. To see *The Driver's Seat* as a tragedy helps to explain its peculiarity, which has baffled and irritated some readers while exciting others. The traditional category of crime fiction is comedy and because it conforms to this tradition a novel like *The Comforters* has proved less disturbing.

One reason for treating *The Driver's Seat* as a crime novel' is that it contains a murder. Another is that a trail of clues leads to the murder. And finally, the whole narrative is concerned with finding the murderer. John Cawelti lays down three minimum conditions for the classical detective story: first there must be a mystery; second the process of enquiry must be central to the plot and must be conducted by a detached protagonist; third the concealed facts must be made known at the end. In so far as there is a mystery in *The Driver's Seat* concerning the identity of the murderer - the usual source of mystery in the classical detective story - and given that the search which occupies most of the text is for this murderer, whose identity is revealed at the end, the novel conforms to John Cawelti's conditions. The major departure is that the central character, so far from being a disinterested detective, is wholly concerned in the outcome as it is her own murderer she is seeking.

The substitution of the victim for the detective entails a corresponding change in the sequence of narrated events. Classical detective stories are both backward looking and forward directed. The process of detection is necessarily retrospective as its goal is to establish a series of events which occurred prior to the first narrated action, but the reader is encouraged to keep going in the confident expectation that the narration is leading irrevocably to the moment when all will be made clear. What the reader anticipates is nevertheless a revelation relating to actions which precede the opening of the narrative. As a consequence of making the victim her heroine, Muriel Spark narrates the series of events which conventionally precede the action proper. Instead of observing the detective unravelling a series of clues which are the residue of the past in the present, the reader watches the clues being laid down. The text draws

attention to this when it says of Lise, 'And it is almost as if, satisfied that she has successfully registered the fact of her presence at the airport among the July thousands there, she has fulfilled a small item of a greater purpose' (p.20). That the purpose has to do with the process of detection is made clear later: 'So she lays the trail presently to be followed by Interpol' (p.51). Many of Lise's actions make sense only if interpreted as ways of ensuring that people will remember her and so offer their stories to the detectives. Other actions seem designed to ensure that some effort on the part of the detectives will be necessary, as when she disposes of her passport in a taxi, '"This will keep it safe," says Lise, stuffing her passport down the back of the seat' (p.52). By deliberately creating a mystery but leaving enough clues to enable the detectives to solve it, Lise conforms to the requirements of the genre, and ensures that the solution will need some time - enough to fill a plot? The novel's denial of the conventional past, its positioning of the crime as well as the revelation of the murderer's identity at the end of the novel, makes the whole text future orientated, and this is emphasized by repeated use of prolepsis. The outcome of Lise's search is not left in any doubt, for early in the text the reader is informed:

> She will be found tomorrow morning dead from multiple stab-wounds, her wrists bound with a silk scarf and her ankles bound with a man's necktie, in the grounds of an empty villa, in a park of the foreign city to which she is travelling on the flight now boarding at gate 14. (p.25)

The rest of the narrative shows how this end is accomplished; rather than a 'who-dunnit' it is a 'who-is-going-to-do-it'. Without the use of prolepsis the reader would not know until the end that it is a crime novel.

The novels of Alain Robbe-Grillet also employ and subvert formulas and make for interesting comparisons with Muriel Spark's. In *The Erasers*, which parodies conventions of the detective novel, he too explores the representation of time and in particular the dual pressures exerted by past and future. This has the effect of making the present appear illusory and draws attention to the problem of fixing the flow of time, for by trying to capture a moment the writer freezes it into something already past. In a passage describing the descent of a drawbridge he writes:

> But on the other side of the barrier, it was apparent that everything was not yet over; because of a certain elasticity in the materials, the platform's descent had not stopped when the machinery did; it had continued for several seconds, moving a fraction of an inch perhaps, creating a tiny gap in the continuity of the roadway which brought the metal rim slightly above its position of equilibrium; and the oscillations - growing fainter and fainter, less and less noticeable, but whose cessation it was difficult to be certain of - consequently approximated - by a series of successive prolongations and regressions on either side of a quite illusory fixity - a phenomenon completed, nevertheless, some time before.[8]

It is not surprising that the hesitations, advances and retreats of the writing reflect the movements described; Alain Robbe-Grillet's novels are characteristically self-referential, drawing attention to the process of writing itself. The 'quite illusory fixity' could therefore be seen as the illusion created by classic realist texts, and the whole as a meditation on the difficulty of representing a world which is continually in motion. Muriel Spark is reported to have said of Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'His novels have a special kind of drama - perhaps the drama of exact observation'[9]. Her comment is pertinent to this passage, where the more meticulously he

describes the material objects, and their minute, imperceptible movements, the more difficult it becomes for the reader to hold a firm picture in the mind. By this paradox he creates the very difficulty he is commenting on.

Both Muriel Spark and Alain Robbe-Grillet have emphasized that the act of writing, which exists in the present, is primary, and not the recording of events which have already occurred in the external world. Further, they undermine conventions which seek to create the illusion of recounting credible happenings. Muriel Spark is reported by Frank Kermode as saying:

> I express it in the past tense, but in the actual process, as far as I am concerned, it happens in the present tense. Things just happen and one records what has happened a few seconds later. ...events occur in my mind and I record them.[10]

The interview was first published in 1963; by 1970 when she published *The Driver's Seat* Muriel Spark was, like Alain Robbe-Grillet, using present tense narration which reflects her insistence on the fictionality of her text. It is consistent with her comments to Frank Kermode that she should narrate in the present the events leading to the murder rather than begin in the conventional way and appear to assert that the text is concerned with extra-diegetic actions which have already occurred.

Both writers confuse the normal allocation of roles in detective fiction. Jerry Palmer in an essay on thrillers says, 'the hero never starts the action of a thriller: he always reacts to prior aggression'[11]. But in *The Driver's Seat* the heroine does start the action and induces her murderer to commit the crime. In the aeroplane he changes his seat in order to get away from her, and afterwards he 'heaves a deep breath as if he had escaped from death by a

small margin' (p.29). This is another instance of Muriel Spark using a hackneyed figure of speech and reinvesting it with literal meaning for in escaping from Lise he has, at least temporarily, escaped from death, her death and his compulsion to inflict it. The word 'escaped' makes his status as victim explicit and underlines the reversal of convention in this story where the victim pursues her murderer relentlessly.

In *The Erasers* there is confusion about who initiates action and who is guilty. Here too murder is the end towards which the action is directed, although it appears to be the initiating action. The detective is so engrossed with events that have supposedly taken place that he is led finally to carry them out himself. On one level it can be seen that in order to justify the role of detective there must be a crime to detect; Wallas has to commit murder in order to make sense of his task and of the novel as detective fiction. The text draws attention to the reversal whereby the detective becomes the initiator: 'Madame Jean thinks about this strange turn of events in which the guilty man himself takes charge of the investigation'[12]. Madame Jean is depicted as totally confused and so it is incongruous to discover later that her perception is correct, an incongruity which Muriel Spark also exploits in her use of apparently unreliable characters to utter remarks which are validated by the rest of the text. To imply that the detective, as well as the victim and the culprit, are all trapped by the requirements of the detective genre is in a sense to propose that none of them is ultimately guilty. Guilt rests with the writer who chooses a genre in which crimes have to occur and criminals have to be identified. In *The Erasers* there is a point at which the idea is mooted of sending an 'assistant' from Paris to investigate the murder which has supposedly been committed:

But the assistant shakes his head. It is quite futile for him to waste his time in that gloomy provincial town, half asleep in the North Sea fog. He would find nothing there, absolutely nothing. It is here in the capital that the drama has been acted ... that the drama *is being* acted.[13]

The emphasis on the present tense in the last phrase, taken in conjunction with Alain Robbe-Grillet's insistence on writing as creation in the present, not as comment on events which exist outside the text, makes it reasonable to accept this passage as an admission of his own guilt.

In *The Genesis of Secrecy* Frank Kermode considers the requirements imposed by narrative. Seeking to explain differences between the Gospels of Mark and Matthew, he argues that Matthew was more aware of the need for a good story to have coherence and causal explanations. Hence Matthew's Gospel can be seen as an interpretation through its own narrative of the earlier version by Mark. After examining differences between their accounts of what happened to Judas after the crucifixion, Frank Kermode comments:

> Nothing but an interest in character can account for these narrative additions. There was an original need of narrative, and it was supplied by narrative interpretation of the testimony. But narrative begot character, and character begot new narrative. In the course of these developments, new gaps may be inevitable. This is how interpretation works in fiction.[14]

The Erasers draws attention to these requirements of narrative and of "vraisemblance" through Wallas's reflections on his own fabrications:

> As for passing himself off as a tourist, aside from the unlikelihood of the excuse at this time of year in a city completely barren of appeal for an art lover, this

> offered still greater dangers: where would the woman's questions have led him then, since the post office had been enough to create the telegram....[15]

In saying that it was 'the post office' that necessitated the invention of a story about a telegram, the text emphasizes the power of narrative to generate further narrative. Detective fiction depends on conflicting stories, ones that within the text are classified as lies and those which are vindicated; the task of the detective is to establish causality and coherence, choosing between rival stories, thereby reflecting within the text the role of the reader outside it. Wallas ponders, 'What kind of spell is it that is forcing him to give explanations wherever he goes today?'[16]. The reader knows the answer; the 'spell' is the demands not just of fiction but of the specific genre of detective fiction.

The importance of methods of narration characteristic of detective fiction is persuasively explained by Peter Hühn. He emphasizes the complex 'coupling' of narratives:

> The usual constellation of story and discourse ... occurs twice over: the story of the crime is mediated in the discourse of the detective's investigation; and the story of the detective's investigation, in its turn, is mediated in the narrator's discourse.... In both cases the story is hidden for the most part so that the reader is doubly puzzled - trying to make out the mysterious crime story by way of the almost equally mystifying detection story.[17]

In discussing parallels between the detective's and the reader's attempts to find the correct solution to the mystery, he observes that in the first case it is the culprit who tries to frustrate the attempt and in the second the author tries to prevent premature disclosure. He suggests that the pleasure afforded by the implicit invitation 'to participate in the game' may be

supplemented for intellectuals by the 'appeal ... of watching their special professional skills of interpretation exercised in a thrilling and playful manner'[18]. His analysis brings out the contest for control of meaning which is constructed through the mechanisms of the detective story. It underlines the force of *The Driver's Seat*'s disruption of conventionally assigned roles, indicating how the text appears to deny both authorial control and the power of the detective to reassert social norms. He links this to the concept of freedom:

> The criminal attempts to realize himself and to gratify his desires by freeing himself from the restraints of society and its defining norms. By means of his story the criminal creates for himself a free place, a place of his own outside society's order. And as long as he is in exclusive possession of his story, he is, literally, free.[19]

At the end of *The Comforters*, Caroline, like Job, realizes that her only true comfort comes from accepting the plot she finds herself in. Lise, on the other hand, like Peter Hühn's 'criminal', is presented as denying any plot but her own.

The power Lise asserts in *The Driver's Seat* is reflected by the number of roles conflated into one. She occupies the position of heroine-detective, of victim and, in a sense, of culprit. Within the narrative she twice steals cars so that she literally takes over the driver's seat and there is a metaphorical extension of this in the way she controls her own destiny. The implied narrator cedes authority by a denial of knowledge, giving only the information which would be available to any other observer of the events recounted. We are told, 'Her hair is pale brown, probably tinted' (p.18), where the speculation in 'probably' underlines the absence of narrative

omniscience. This is reinforced later by the questions, 'Who knows her thoughts? Who can tell?' (p.50). One answer to these questions is that as a fictional character Lise has no thoughts; it is only the successful creation of an illusion of reality that tempts readers into constructing plausible thought processes not described in the text. By posing these questions the narrative points in two opposed directions: firstly it implies that Lise can have thoughts unknown to the narrator, thereby increasing the impression of her autonomy and power, but secondly it draws attention to the fact that such an implication rests on an illusion. Stephen Knight in *Ideology and Form in Crime Fiction* says:

> The omniscience of the narrator (which can even include a first person narrator) is a crucial part of the illusion by which the classic novel asserts the world is comprehensible to a gifted single intelligence.[20]

The denial of omniscience in *The Driver's Seat* is one of the ways in which it rejects easy comfort, refusing us the consolation of an imposed coherence. Kathryn Hume says of such practice, 'it can destroy our ikons, or can fulfil the highest function of literature, as Sartre saw it: remind us of our freedom'[21].

The appearance of autonomy for Lise implicates the reader in her uncomfortable freedom. An emphasis on processes of reading makes clear that in detective fiction clues are ultimately planted for the reader, not for the detective. The absence of a final meaning inscribed within the text by its author leaves the reader with the task of deciphering the clues which indicate what meaning it may have. The title of *The Driver's Seat* therefore, at the level of discourse if not of story, contains the possiblity that the reader is allowed the freedom to control the meaning, or is ultimately in the driver's seat. In one sense this is always the case in that, however strenuously writers try to impose their own

visions, they cannot determine all the possible readings that will be found in their texts. The difference is, perhaps, that some texts explicitly include this realization within what is given, acknowledging the participation of the reader in unravelling clues. Northrop Frye sees the denial of omniscience as characteristic of irony:

> The ironic fiction-writer, then, deprecates himself and, like Socrates, pretends to know nothing, even that he is ironic. Complete objectivity and suppression of all explicit moral judgements are essential to his method. Thus pity and fear are not raised in ironic art: they are reflected to the reader from the art.[22]

The emotions of pity and fear which since Aristotle have been traditionally identified as responses to tragedy are, according to Northrop Frye, properly seen as responses to high mimetic tragedy depicting the fall of heroes from positions of eminence. In such instances it is the plight of the hero that arouses an emotional response, whereas in ironic art the response comes from the prompting of readers to reflect on their own situation. It is therefore important to consider whether in *The Driver's Seat* there is a shift of emphasis from the sufferings or guilt of an individual onto prevailing social conditions.

Several commentators have considered the relation between detective stories and social conditions. John Cawelti and Stephen Knight emphasize the consolatory aspect of the genre, arguing that readers find it comforting because they perceive the world around them as threatening and disordered. However, both commentators see the consolations as false, displacing the cause of anxiety so as to produce solutions that are only apparent. In discussing Arthur Conan Doyle's writing, Stephen Knight says:

> The Holmes stories, especially in the period when Doyle's success and Holmes's nature were formed, are a contemporary analogue to a series of folk-tales, or a set of epic lays in which a figure fitted to be a culture hero of his period was presented in a medium and form technologically and epistemologically valid for a contemporary class. ...Month by month in *The Strand Magazine* readers could see, through the plots, the crimes and the criminals of the Holmes stories, an account of what they felt might go wrong in a world that was recognisably theirs and which was, through the force of omissions and the formation of its problematic, one where their own set of values would work. The consolations were great, and the wit and verve of Doyle's writing give those comforts the illusory vitality of a living system.[23]

The detective's triumph in solving mysteries serves as an apparent guarantee that society's values can be protected by an exceptional individual. The suggested parallels between a nineteenth-century detective and a mediaeval questing knight bring out the romance aspect of the stories. John Cawelti argues that crime fiction is particularly well suited to the ambiguity of individual responses to the demands of society:

> Throughout its long-lasting tradition, literary crime serves as an ambiguous mirror of social values, reflecting both our overt commitments to certain principles of morality and order and our hidden resentments and animosity against those principles.[24]

The combination of rule-governed convention with a celebration of individual skill reflects the ambiguity he discerns. Jerry Palmer also indicates contradictions handled through the genre when he claims that thrillers offer an answer to the question, 'if all individuals are inherently self-seeking and competitive, how is it possible that the social order exists?'[25] But the answer

is only a pseudo-resolution, for it appears to say that those self-seeking and competitive individuals who finally achieve dominance will be ones who share the moral and political views of the majority.

Northrop Frye's definition of such stories as ironic in mode does not contradict these arguments but because he shifts the focus of attention away from the hero towards the criminal his view is bleaker. He endorses the concept that the criminal in a detective story is the real victim and stresses the cruel aspect of the sacrifice of a scapegoat, seeing in the genre 'the formula of how a man-hunter locates a *pharmakos* and gets rid of him'[20]. Muriel Spark and Alain Robbe-Grillet are typical of high-brow twentieth-century writers in their use of an ironic mode to unsettle genre conventions. The reason for their transformations cannot be that life is perceived as less threatening and consolation as less desirable; the continued popularity of crime fiction in which the formulas are left intact, particularly in film and television, implies the opposite. As Stephen Knight's analysis makes clear, the triumph of the detective is the triumph of individualism and can be seen as supportive of capitalist notions of enterprise. The displacement of responsibility for social ills onto scapegoats, evil outsiders, is characteristic of individualist morality; it is far more comfortable for the classes in power than analyses of the causes of crime which locate responsibilty within the very social and economic structures which give these classes their power.

Kathryn Hume's explanation of the different impulses behind fantasy and mimesis clarifies differences between texts which console and texts which disturb. She argues that:

Literature is the product of two impulses. These are *mimesis*, felt as the desire to imitate, to describe events, people, situations, and objects with such verisimilitude that others can share your experience; and *fantasy*, the desire to change givens and alter reality - out of boredom, play, vision, longing for something lacking, or need for metaphoric images that will bypass the audience's verbal defences.[27]

She goes on to propose four categories of literature corresponding to four functions of fantasy, and these are described in the following table[28]:

	illusion	*vision*	*revision*	*disillusion*
aim:	comfort	disturb	comfort	disturb
effect:	disengage-ment	engage-ment	engage-ment	disengage-ment

Her categories are helpful in their indication of the different purposes which fantasy can fulfil, and in the attention they give to relations between textual strategies and the responses of readers. Using her system of classification, both *The Erasers* and *The Driver's Seat* can be called texts which aim to disturb, and in disturbing genre conventions they also disturb the political consolations achieved through those conventions. Furthermore it seems reasonable to consider them both as belonging to her category 'literature of disillusion'. She says of this category, 'Such pleasure as there is to be had from perspectivist literature perhaps comes from our enjoyment in giving a name to the problem, even when we cannot find the solution'[29]. In addition to this kind of pleasure there is the satisfaction of feeling sufficiently strong to reject false systems of consolation. There is also gratification in endorsing an attack on the complacent acceptance of prevailing social and political power structures.

The Driver's Seat draws attention to its disturbance of the genre through self-referential comments. When Lise leaves the hotel with her murderer she speaks to the porter: '"Would you like a book to read?" She holds out her paperback. "I don't need it any more"' (p.101). Shortly afterwards she says:

> ...it's a whydunnit in q-sharp major and it has a message: never talk to the sort of girls that you wouldn't leave lying around in your drawing-room for the servants to pick up. (p.101)

For the baffled reader this appears as a much needed clue. As Lise finishes with her life she finishes with her book, which by extension suggests the book we are reading. The substitution of 'whydunnit' for 'whodunnit' corresponds to the upsetting of convention and to the search for motivation the reader is likely to experience. But what is the confused reader to make of 'q-sharp major'? Is it significant that we are in a major key whereas the sombreness of the subject would more usually be treated in a minor key? This could alert us to the possibility of an optimistic reading, but since 'q-sharp' is an impossible key (and maybe a sharp question) perhaps we should not place much reliance on it. The final joke plays on a witty confusion between girls and books and the pun on 'pick-up'. It suggests the danger Lise represents to the misguided men who pick her up in the course of the novel; she is definitely not the sort of person it is safe to leave lying around in the drawing-room. The reference to protecting the servants captures the patronising concern of those who suppose they know best what is good for others, and echoes the obscenity trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, but because the conventional expression of this idea is garbled, and because the idea itself is now anachronistic, it reads as a light-hearted joke rather than a serious social comment.

Several critics have pursued the question of 'whydunnit', seeking some credible psychological explanation for Lise's behaviour. But their attempts run counter to the grain of the novel. Posing the question 'why' draws attention to the absence of any account of Lise's motivation, and it is this gap, rather than attempts to fill it, that deserves attention. When Mrs Fiedke is helping Lise to find 'her type' she asks, '"Will you feel a presence? Is that how you'll know?"', and what follows is, '"Not really a presence," Lise says. "The lack of an absence, that's what it is..."' (p.71). The concept of absence, as well as the attempt to fill it, is central in this novel. One effect of the refusal to give a psychological portrait of the heroine is to shift attention away from individual problems and suffering towards the presentation of the whole of society. John Cawelti compares the treatment of guilt in detective fiction with Freud's analysis, saying:

> Where the detective story resolved this concern by pretending to find the hidden secret in someone else's mind, psychoanalysis went directly to the root of the problem by exposing and confronting the individual's own inner tension and anxiety.[30]

Provided the individual concerned is a fictional character, or someone else, the revelation is still safely distanced. In a novel, therefore, to indicate that causality is social rather than located in the disturbed mind of an individual is to implicate the reader more directly.

Peter Kemp's reading of the novel focuses on the social: '*The Driver's Seat* is contemporary, too, in being a story of the global village, of a world infected with a deadly, artificial sameness'[31]. A conversation between Lise and Mrs Fiedke supports his view: '"Our home is in Novia Scotia," says Mrs Fiedke, "where is yours?" "Nowhere special," says Lise waving aside the triviality' (p.54).

The reluctance to give the names of cities and countries where the action takes place, as well as the motif of travel itself, implies that the settings are to be seen as representative rather than specific. The modern world is characterized, through repeated references to cleanliness and sterility, as one in which humans are reluctant to become contaminated by emotional sympathy. The response to the political coup in the novel is selfish and mercenary: '"What country is it? I hope it doesn't affect us. The last time there was a coup my shares regressed so I nearly had a breakdown. Even the mutual funds...' (p.84). The word 'mutual' leads to a breakdown in the sentence; if this world is a village it is not one in which there is any interest in the political motivations of others or in their well-being. Peter Kemp refers to it as:

> ...a civilization, the recurrent motif of covering suggests, in which the natural is held at one remove, the real thing - even when this is genuine emotional response - kept behind some outer layer that protects it or conceals.[32]

It is consistent with such a vision that the group of 'Scandinavian-sounding' young men should intervene when Lise accuses Bill of theft, but not when he tries to rape her. The rejection of a dress whose 'material doesn't stain' (p.7) appears in this context to indicate the desirability of an alternative world where messiness and drama might be found. Even 'lonely grief' (p.96) is shown as preferable to the dominant absence of emotion.

The text gives fleeting evocations of an alternative world associated with distant or vanished cultures. There is an extended description of the Pavilion at night in which the identification of the present with the words 'empty' and 'nothing' is juxtaposed with hints of a richer past:

> The ground floor of the Pavilion is largely glass-fronted. She goes up to it and peers in. There are bare

café tables and chairs piled high in the fashion of restaurants closed for the night. There is a long counter and a coffee machine at the far end, with an empty glass sandwich-bar. There is nothing else except an expanse of floor, which in the darkness can only be half-seen, patterned in black-and-white chequered pavements. Lise cranes and twists to see the ceiling which obscurely seems to be painted with some classical scene; the hind leg of a horse and one side of a cupid are all that is visible.

Still she peers through the glass. Bill tries to draw her away, but again she starts to cry. "Oh," she says, "the inconceivable sorrow of it, those chairs piled up at night when you're sitting in a café, the last one left." (p.95-6)

There is a remarkable change of register in 'the inconceivable sorrow of it', which contrasts with the brisk, unemotional style characteristic of *The Driver's Seat*, and with the suggestion of pantomime in 'the hind-leg of a horse'. Furthermore, the sorrow expressed seems out of all proportion to the sight of piled up chairs, although it is partly explained by the evocation of the loneliness which causes people to linger in cafés until everyone else has departed. It is also possible to connect the sense of loss with the contrast between the Pavilion's bleak, modern furnishings and its painted ceiling, which hints at previous, more elegant occupations of the room but can be seen only in part and 'obscurely'.

The description of the Arabs leaving the Hilton provides another instance of more exotic or emotive resonances emerging through the stark contemporary world. The dissonance is emphasized by an uncharacteristic use of imagery: 'they seem to share a single soul or else two well-rehearsed parts in the the chorus of an opera by

Verdi' ; 'two large baskets, each one packed with oranges and a jumbo-sized vacuum-flask which stands slightly askew among the fruit, like champagne in an ice-bucket'; and 'the caravan goes its stately way' (p.84). The incongruous likening of limousines to a 'caravan' conjures up the associations of that word with processions of camels, and highlights the gap between a modern hotel in a European city and an ancient culture in an exotic setting. Another shift of register comes in:

> Lise keeps her flat as clean-lined and clear to return to after her work as if it were uninhabited. The swaying tall pines among the litter of cones on the forest floor have been subdued into silence and into obedient bulks. (p.15)

The lyricism with which the live trees is evoked is in startling contrast to the plain, unadorned description of the "dead" flat, and to the clumsiness of the words, 'obedient bulks'. The combined effect of the momentary shifts of register is to remind us of an alternative range of possibilities, where nature or culture provide experiences of gracefulness, which are almost, but not quite, 'subdued into silence' by the harsh functionalism of modern life. The remaining traces of such gracefulness are sufficient to provoke sorrow at its loss.

Nostalgia for the past is consistent with the references to Lise's conservatism: 'her hem line has for some years been an old-fashioned length' (p.21). The emphasis on her 'daily disapprovals' (p.9) establishes early on that she is at odds with contemporary society, standing out against its norms and fashions. The significance of the novel's references to prevailing social conditions is emphasized by the repeated use of 'these days', a phrase which has derisive connotations when uttered by Mrs Fiedke. However, there is no implication that the derision is shared by the implied author; the irony in the presentation of Mrs

Fiedke suggests, rather, a detached, satirical stance towards those who continually lament that the present fails to match up to the values of the past[33]. Although Lise is depicted as standing apart from aspects of her society, some of her most bizarre behaviour is not only accepted blandly by other characters, their own behaviour echoes hers. At the airport bookstall it seems to be the accepted norm to buy books to match, or clash with, an existing colour scheme. And Bill and Mrs Fiedke enter into Lise's exploits with astonishing alacrity. Through their participation, the novel depicts the whole of society, not just isolated individuals, as bizarre, but Lise's 'disapprovals' imply that there is a point beyond which continuing to live in such a society becomes intolerable.

The emotional response which is denied by the narrative is alluded to in the final sentence, inviting consideration of *The Driver's Seat* in the context of tragedy while at the same time emphasizing the absence of emotional affect:

> He sees already the gleaming buttons of the policemen's uniforms, hears the cold and the confiding, the hot and barking voices, sees already the holsters and epaulets and all those trappings devised to protect them from the indecent exposure of fear and pity, pity and fear. (p.107)

The motif of covering which Peter Kemp comments on is here linked to the policemen's carapaces which effectively conceal feelings. This decent covering over is consistent with the operation of those conventions of the detective genre which protect readers from feeling pity and fear at the end of the narrative and thereby sustain the comic resolution. Typically, readers' sympathies are controlled so that they are engaged only with characters who are finally known as virtuous, or at least not criminally culpable, even though their innocence may be in doubt during the course of the novel. Sympathy with the culprit

is avoided by the convention of the 'least likely person'[34]; this ensures that the character who is finally exposed as a villain will have received comparatively little attention, thereby making the readers' premature resolution of the puzzle unlikely as well as safeguarding them from feeling dismay at the denouement. There appears to be a joking reference to this convention in *The Erasers* when the Chief Commissioner, Laurent, observes of one hypothesis, 'Even altogether unlikely, but you know that never kept anyone from being a suspect'[35]. Lise's search, coming as it does before the crime, is seemingly as difficult as the traditional detective's, but could be described as a search for the most likely suspect, the person most likely to do what she wishes. But there is no attempt to arouse emotional sympathy and concern for this, or any other, character.

Nevertheless, *The Driver's Seat* denies the characteristic closure of detective stories. The problem of 'afterwards' is introduced in a conversation between Lise and Richard:

> "Sex is normal," he says. "I'm cured. Sex is all right."
>
> "It's all right at the time and it's all right before," says Lise, "but the problem is afterwards. That is, if you aren't just an animal. Most of the time, afterwards is pretty sad."
>
> "You're afraid of sex," he says, almost joyfully, as if seizing an opportunity to gain control.
>
> "Only of afterwards," she says. "But that doesn't matter any more." (p.103)

It doesn't matter any more to Lise because she has solved the problem of the aftermath of sex by engineering her own death. There is no invitation in the novel to consider her death in relation to eternity; indeed, she is said to perceive 'how final is finality' (p.107). It is for Richard, whose initial optimism about his 'cure' does not

acknowledge a problem of 'afterwards', that the aftermath of this particular sex act is destined to lead to 'the sad little office where the police clank in and out' (p.107). By opening up the vista of what happens after the murderer is exposed the novel disrupts the mechanism whereby alien thoughts of punishment and damnation are kept at bay.

But the religious perspective implied by "damnation" is absent from this novel. Malcolm Bradbury describes Muriel Spark's work as, 'a kind of outwitting of the "nouveau roman" by showing that if the world is all present and disconnected there is always the claim of a future; plot can be won from a plotless world'[36]. While its clarity at the level of action constructs a plot that is unlike those of the "new novelists", this particular novel seems no more optimistic about a 'future', nor about meaningful existence, than those of Alain Robbe-Grillet. The fictions of both novelists explore possibilities that are more various than their theoretical statements encourage us to expect[37]. It appears that Muriel Spark's engagement with the 'anti-novel' - she is reported as telling Philip Toynbee, 'I don't in the least accept the theory of the anti-novel'[38] - is a response to the force of its negations and reveals a need to counter that force. It is not surprising that the bleakest of her novels should have much in common with one of Robbe-Grillet's; their shared disruption of genre conventions exposes abysses which the conventions serve to conceal. It is as though in this novel the 'bottomless pit' which Barbara recoiled from in *The Mandelbaum Gate* is contemplated and is again linked to the negations and despair seen as characteristic of the work of 'the new French writers'[39].

A definition of *The Driver's Seat* as a tragedy is suggested by its reference to 'pity and fear'. Such a definition is supported by the close correspondence

between the novel and Northrop Frye's definition of the fifth phase of the tragic mythos:

> *Oedipus Tyrannus* belongs here, and all tragedies and tragic episodes which suggest the existential projection of fatalism, and, like much of the Book of Job, seem to raise metaphysical or theological questions rather than social or moral ones.[40]

Lise's organisation of her own murder is consistent with the idea of fatalism because of the absence of explanation or motivation. Her search for death is simply a given of the text, and this can be linked to another of Northrop Frye's comments: 'The archetype of the inevitably ironic is Adam, human nature under sentence of death'[41]. The questions raised, as this implies, have to do with the human condition, and the relation of the human with the divine, rather than with individual psychology. There are elements in the text, such as the description of the actual murder, that move towards Northrop Frye's sixth phase of tragedy: 'a world of shock and horror in which the central images are images of sparagmos, that is cannibalism, mutilation, and torture'[42]. After Lise steals Carlos's car comes the following passage:

> She spins along in an expert style, stopping duly at the traffic lights. She starts to sing softly as she waits:
>
> Inky-pinky-winky-wong
> How do you like your potatoes done?
> A little gravy in the pan
> For the king of the Cannibal Islands. (p.82)

There is a macabre juxtaposition between the chirpy form of her song and its words, and the macabre is appropriate given that she is preparing herself as a kind of human sacrifice. Northrop Frye's sixth phase of tragedy corresponds not just to the death of the God, nor even to his absence; he is mutilated, torn apart and scattered. The reference to 'Cannibal Islands' is appropriate to this

novel in which the bleakness is not softened by any promise of redemption.

The contrast within Lise's song reflects the contrast within her situation, and the contrast between humour and despair within the novel as a whole. In one sense Lise's assertion of control could be seen as triumphant. She presents the image of a woman in control of her own destiny who when men try to seduce or rape her succeeds in outwitting them and stealing their cars. The identification of cars with the sexual aggressiveness and power of the male makes these thefts a form of castration. But what might be a glorification of female power is undercut by the end towards which that power is directed; it is as though in this novel Muriel Spark says that women have the capacity to destroy themselves but not destroy the forces which may make their lives untenable. There is a point at which Lise's power is denied:

> He ties her hands, and she tells him in a sharp, quick voice to take off his necktie and bind her ankles.
>
> "No," he says, kneeling over her, "not your ankles."
>
> "I don't want any sex," she shouts. "You can have it afterwards. Tie my feet and kill, that's all. They will come and sweep it up in the morning."
>
> All the same, he plunges into her, with the knife poised high. (p.106)

Her murderer here asserts his own freedom, as the pun on 'plunges' makes horrifyingly clear. Although Lise has planned every detail of her death and almost succeeds in totally controlling the situation, in this one instance her murderer-victim thwarts her; for a brief time he occupies the driver's seat. This aberration draws attention to the limits of human control and capacity for accurate prediction. The story of Adam and Eve explores the tension between God's knowledge and power and human

freedom of choice; similarly *The Driver's Seat* uses the concept of the limited power of the author and of the protagonist as a way of commenting on individual freedom.

Northrop Frye says of the need for authorial detachment:

> The tragic poet knows that his hero will be in a tragic situation, but he exerts all his power to avoid the sense of having manipulated that situation for his own purposes. He exhibits his hero to us as God exhibits Adam to the angels.[43]

And yet, however much power the author exerts to deny it, we know that he or she has 'manipulated that situation'. Hence the difficulty of the task Milton set himself. Muriel Spark's comment on the significance of the Job story is pertinent here, 'At the point where human reason cannot reconcile the fact of evil with the goodness of God, an anthropomorphic conception of God breaks down. Is this not the main point of the Book of Job?'[44] Her reading provides an alternative to the conclusion that God is not good; it also suggests that while her texts may be seen as analogous to biblical stories they are not mirror images of those stories; the author may have similarities to God but is not God. For those who do not share her faith in God, and who place more reliance on reason than on a desire to believe in a benevolent deity, a different conclusion from Muriel Spark's is inescapable. They may retain the concept of a creator while doubting his goodness, or may view the biblical text as just another human production which not surprisingly shares the characteristics of other narratives. But the world view of the reader does not diminish the capacity of her work to comment on the kind of God envisioned in the Bible, and on the construction of concepts of good and evil.

The distinction which Northrop Frye makes between irony in a comic phase and irony in a tragic one is pertinent to

the difference between *The Driver's Seat* and *The Comforters*. His statement that, 'Irony with little satire is the non-heroic residue of tragedy, centering on a theme of puzzled defeat'[45] is in accordance with the absence of heroic stature in the later text as well as with the sense of puzzlement about the necessity for Lise's death. Satire, on the other hand, he says, 'demands at least a token fantasy, a content which the reader recognizes as grotesque, or at least an implicit moral standard, the latter being essential in a militant attitude to experience'[46]. A 'militant attitude' is evident in a comment on her work made by Muriel Spark in an interview with Graham Lord, 'But also it's satire. I think we should ridicule what is wrong. ...That's the only honourable weapon left'[47]. It is easier to identify a moral standard in *The Comforters* than in *The Driver's Seat*, and the element of ridicule is more evident, too, in the earlier novel. It seems to correspond to Kathryn Hume's definition of literature of vision, where the use of fantasy to disturb normal expectations also engages readers in constructing an alternative way of seeing. Satire urges activity, or the sense that activity is possible, whereas tragic irony promotes passive dismay, the sense that action is futile[48].

5.3 *NOT TO DISTURB*

Whereas definitions of crime fiction depend on rule-based plots, definitions of gothic fiction depend on a set of well established motifs. The derivation of gothic revival from the visual arts is still evident in the visuality of these motifs, which accounts for the ease with which they have been transferred onto film. Tania Modleski in her study of popular fiction for women, *Loving With a Vengeance*, turned to a visual example when seeking to categorize the expectations aroused by the word:

> Gothics can be identified by their cover illustrations: each portrays a young girl wearing a long, flowing gown and standing in front of a large, menacing-looking castle or mansion. The atmosphere is dark and stormy, and the ethereal young girl appears to be frightened.[1] The gown should be white to symbolize the innocence of the girl whose youth and purity are contrasted with the menacing forces of evil, symbolized by darkness and storm. Typically, an older, powerful man represents the threat of evil and owns the castle or mansion, which is in turn a symbolic representation of his character.

Clearly this is a simplification, but no doubt one that is instantly recognizable. Tania Modleski's concern is specifically with writing for women and her focus is on texts produced in the twentieth century. Most commentators on gothic fiction begin their consideration with eighteenth-century texts, tracing developments through the proliferation of different kinds of fiction produced subsequently. They all, however, try to establish an account of gothic which penetrates through the, frequently silly, superficial motifs to an underlying seriousness of engagement with human experiences. Accounts of gothic revival in the second half of the eighteenth century

usually emphasize a desire to escape from the confines of polite civilization and the limitations of reason; Marilyn Butler characterizes the art of the period: 'The strongest single tendency of late eighteenth century art was to reject the ephemeral in favour of the essential'[2]. The association of mediaeval gothic with spiritual exaltation and mystery also helps the case for discerning a serious quest beneath the trappings of gothic fiction.

A salutory counterblast to an over solemn treatment of the genre is provided by Robert Kiely in *The Romantic Novel in England*. One of his observations is:

> That the source of much Gothic fiction was boredom rather than righteous anger or scorn or visionary commitment helps to explain its lack of focus and moral seriousness as a literary form.[3]

As he indicates, boredom can lead to a sense of delight in rule-breaking and in excess as ends in themselves. The element of fun in gothic fiction is evident in *Not To Disturb*, the novel by Muriel Spark which makes most use of gothic conventions. It has the obligatory isolated, large house in a suitably exotic setting, there is a wild, stormy night which is the external equivalent of events inside the house, the fog comes up on the lake, and there is even a mad person in the attic. But something is awry. The house by Lake Geneva, with its 'filigree of Regency wrought iron banisters' is entirely pastiche having been built 'eleven years ago' (p.26). The component parts are said to be genuine - 'The Adam mantelpiece at one end of the room came through the Swiss customs along with the rest as did the twin mantelpiece in the ante-room at the other end' (p.26); 'This parquet flooring once belonged to a foreign king' (p.28) - but the effect they create is false, like the '*trompe-l'oeil* chequered paving of the hall' (p.10). The house itself could be seen as emblematic of the novel. The gothic components, which originally

fitted into their contexts, have been borrowed and the assemblage cannot create a genuine gothic text.

The text foregrounds the element of pastiche; there is no deception involved. The shutters which bang in the storm have been expressly loosened by Pablo, the handyman. The storm which he anticipates arrives on cue, exposing the artifice of the convention. And the figure of the madperson in the attic has been transformed from an unacknowledged, dreaded presence into a figure of fun in a red jump-suit. The final reference to him is, 'A homely howl comes down from the attic' (p.94), and the homeliness applies to the familiarity of the literary device as well as to the character. The incongruous juxtaposition of 'homely' and 'howl' draws attention to the stripping away of the uncanny from this howl, which is 'heimlich' rather than 'unheimlich' - the terminology used by Sigmund Freud in *The 'Uncanny'*. The change in gender of the mad person in itself reduces its fearful aspect and this is effective in illuminating the way in which the archetypal figure of the mad woman carries the menace of suppressed aspects of female anger and desire. A mad male character need not be as comic as Muriel Spark's creation but could not connote in the same way the sense of transgression and violation of the normal order. The change also implicates the tendency for male characters to be considered as individuals whereas female characters are often considered as typifying general aspects of female experience. Parody is again evident when Irene brings a large, branched candlestick into the drawing-room: '"Don't light the candles yet," says Eleanor, raising her eyes to the ceiling, from above which comes the sound of a scuffle and a howl. "Goodness knows what might happen. We don't want a fire."' (p.73). The culmination of the dramatic action of *Jane Eyre* is reduced to a joke.

The obviously recognizable way Muriel Spark uses gothic motifs enables her to make an implicit criticism of their exaggeration and of the pathetic fallacy which underlies the typical use of stormy weather and a setting in wild natural scenery. However, her references to *Jane Eyre* work in a more complex manner, which is not surprising given her admiration for Charlotte Brontë. In the introduction to her edition of *The Brontë Letters* she refers to the sisters as 'outstanding figures of literature'[4], and she also comments, 'But by far the richest inheritance the Brontë children received from their father was the symbol of storm'[5]. This may appear ironic given her own fictional treatment of storms, but it emphasizes that what may be pleasurable to the reader is not always usable by the writer; the difference of historical context changes the meaning a motif can bear. By invoking a text in which human emotion is valued and decisions about marriage are deeply serious, *Not To Disturb* makes a bleak comment on the modern world it depicts. It is a world in which all supposedly major events - birth, marriage, death - are seen to be divested of moral significance and emotional import: '"Oh," says Heloise, holding her stomach. "It's the quickening. I could faint." But she stands tall, placid and unfainting, gazing out of the window of the servants' sitting-room' (p.5). Just as this passage activates the idea of fainting merely in order to show how far Heloise is from the typical, swooning gothic heroine, so the references to *Jane Eyre* serve to show the extent of the gap between the two novels. Although the vision that informs *Jane Eyre* may be exposed as idealized, there is implicit regret for the loss of such a vision with its moral seriousness and passion. If this is parody, its effect is not to demean the original.

There has been debate and controversy about the precise meaning of the word 'parody'. As the concept is central to

theories of intertextuality, it is worth considering some of the debated issues; they are pertinent both to the engagement with pre-existing texts in Muriel Spark's novels and to a more general understanding of the operation of literary strategies. Elizabeth Dipple in *The Unresolvable Plot* asserts that in recent fiction there has been a change in its function:

> Parody requires redefinition, because for many readers it still carries negative connotations indicating a degradation of a primary text by the wit of a destructively comic imitation. As metafictional norms proliferate, this standard but primitive definition is replaced by a more sophisticated idea of the positive effects of parody as a meditation on the literatures and texts of the past.[6]

But if its function is so different, is it still parody? In other words, should parody be redefined, or should what has been defined as an extension of its traditional function be given a new name? The second alternative is favoured by Gérard Genette. He proposes a complex system of categorization which codifies different effects that may be achieved through transformative and imitative processes. This is best explained by his diagram, which I give below but simplified by the omission of his examples[7]:

régime / relation	ludique	satirique	sérieux
transformation	PARODIE	TRAVESTISSEMENT	TRANSPOSITION
imitation	PASTICHE	CHARGE	FORGERIE

According to his system, the changes noted by Elizabeth Dipple represent a move away from the predominantly playful uses of the anterior text towards the more serious end of the diagram. The historical development seems to have been in this direction, and Genette's placing of, for

example, Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* and James Joyce's *Ulysses* in the category of 'transposition' indicates why critical attention has increasingly focused on 'the positive effects of parody as a meditation on the literatures and texts of the past'. Although *Not To Disturb* is in many respects a playful text, because its references to *Jane Eyre* are equivocal, ridiculing modern society more than Charlotte Brontë's novel, it does not wholly correspond to Genette's definition of parody. In any case it is important to emphasize that the later novel is not a sustained parody or transposition of the earlier one; it is only certain elements of the text that are evoked and transformed.

Another feature of Genette's model is relevant to a consideration of genre and intertextuality. He claims that it is impossible to parody or travesty a genre but that all pastiches must be of genres. His diagram helps makes clear why the last proposition is valid, at least in the case of literature[8], and he amplifies this by explaining that to imitate (or copy) an individual text is too easy and therefore futile, whereas it is conceivable to imitate a *kind* of writing. While this part of his argument makes sense, his insistence that all parodies and travesties must be of individual texts does not allow for the possibility of a playful or satirical transformation of a genre. Another problem with his schema is that it imposes over rigid and exclusive boundaries; the novels of Muriel Spark defy such rigidity by managing to be simultaneously playful, satirical and serious. The relation between *Not To Disturb* and the gothic genre is characterized by 'transformation', and this includes serious engagement with underlying concerns as well as playful mockery of some of the more absurd features of the genre.

There is a further area of controvery surrounding the use of the word 'parody' which has a bearing on Muriel Spark's writing. Pierre Macherey in *A Theory of Literary Production* says of discourse:

> But in that evocative power, by which it denotes a specific reality, it also imitates the everyday language which is the language of ideology. We could offer a provisional definition of literature as being characterized by this power of parody. Mingling the real uses of language in an endless confrontation, it concludes by *revealing* their truth. Experimenting with language rather than inventing it, the literary work is both the analogy of a knowledge and a caricature of customary ideology.[9]

Other commentators, however, seem generally in agreement that the target of parody must always be 'another work of art' - Linda Hutcheon's '"target" text'[10], Gérard Genette's 'hypotexte'. An ironic attack on a target falling outside the same mode of discourse is defined by Linda Hutcheon as 'satire'. Her broad use of the word 'text', however, as well as theories of intertextuality, could be seen to legitimize Macherey's use of 'parody' in that spoken language can be considered as, to use Hutcheon's terminology, 'another form of coded discourse'[11]. His statement encapsulates the effectiveness of much of Muriel Spark's dialogue where comic imitation of customary speech habits exposes their underlying assumptions. Nevertheless, the distinction between satire and parody made by Hutcheon is a useful one and justifies the customary restriction of the word 'parody'. The value of debate about terminology is that it pinpoints historical developments and encourages scrupulous attention to operational distinctions. But the attempt to change familiar word use can confuse more than it clarifies and it may therefore be most helpful to continue

using the word 'parody' to cover a variety of ironic recastings of previously existing texts.

Robert Kiely's analysis of the artistic failure of early gothic novels helps explain why they lend themselves so readily to parody. He sees a disjunction between the form of the novel and the gothic vision: 'The trouble was that they tried to introduce the unnameable into a genre which derived much of its strength from an insistence on naming names'[12]. As a consequence, he says, 'The earliest romantic novelists reached for amplitude and struck excess'[13]. Something of this excess is evoked by Virginia Woolf in an essay entitled 'Gothic romance':

> The skull-headed lady, the vampire gentleman, the whole troop of monks and monsters who once froze and terrified now gibber in some dark cupboard of the servants' hall. In our day we flatter ourselves the effect is produced by subtler means. It is at the ghosts within us that we shudder, and not at the decaying bodies of barons or the subterranean activities of ghouls. Yet the desire to widen our boundaries, to feel excitement without danger, and to escape as far as possible from the facts of life drives us perpetually to trifle with the risky ingredients of the mysterious and the unknown.[14]

We are no longer able to flatter ourselves like this, not least because of the absence of subtlety in many recent films. In *Not To Disturb* it is the effect which changes rather than the means. We are actually inside the servants' hall and there is indeed the body of a baron, if not decaying at least incarcerated in the library (favoured location for country house murder) with two other bodies and plenty of blood. But the violent events are not recounted in a way that moves us to pity or fear. Far from the 'mysterious and the unknown' being located in the crime of murder followed by suicide, the reader is

informed from the beginning about what is to take place and the servants have already prepared their versions of the coming events so that they can sell them without delay. There are no hidden secrets and no ghosts within. The sexual proclivities of the Baron and his wife, as well as those of the servants, are discussed openly, without judgement; all is blandly accepted. Such frank acceptance is a kind of innocence, as the choice of the name 'Heloise' suggests, but it is an innocence that makes guilt attractive because of the compelling power of concealment and transgression. By using incidents and settings redolent of gothic horror but treating them in a way which renders them comic, trivial and unmysterious Muriel Spark succeeds in surprising the reader. It is a technique of defamiliarization used to subvert gothic convention.

While horror movies have not become 'subtle', they too have followed a trajectory from external to internal sources of threat. Andrew Tudor traces this development in a study of films made from the nineteen-thirties to the mid nineteen-eighties. He contrasts what he calls the 'secure horror' of the earlier films with the 'paranoid horror' of more recent ones in a study which draws on structuralist methodology:

> In the world of "secure horror", traditional contrasts hold sway: life/death, secular/supernatural, normal/abnormal physical matter and human/alien. In the contrasting world of "paranoid horror" the principal oppositions are more internal in their emphasis, whether internal to human beings themselves or to their cultures and social systems. Conscious/unconscious, normal/abnormal sexuality, social order/social disorder, sanity/insanity and health/disease all generate threats of a rather different kind.[15]

Concepts of dread and horror, central to definitions of gothic, are given a religious context by Elizabeth MacAndrew in her analysis of the origins of gothic revival. She examines the implications of the rejection of belief in original sin, contrasting, 'the optimistic view that continues to see man as good and to regard evil as the consequence of environment, and the pessimistic idea that his evil is inherent and inexplicable', and says, 'The first is expressed through terror and the sublime, the second through horror and the grotesque'[16]. Both critics emphasize that gothic horror is a way of confronting evil. Whether the source is external or internal, the genre takes it as a given which is not amenable to rational explanation. It is a characteristic of Muriel Spark's fiction that evil is accepted as inevitable and inexplicable. *Not To Disturb* includes many of the features that Tudor's analysis associates with threats - death, the supernatural, abnormal sexuality, social disorder, insanity - but still there is a major disruption of convention because of the absence of the effect of horror.

Acceptance of evil as a given is consistent with the eschewing of psychological motivation. But absence of attention to motivation does not preclude an interest in emotion, nor participation in the gothic concern with the limits of reason. Muriel Spark's interest as a reader with this aspect of gothic literature is evident in her study of Mary Shelley. In *Child of Light* she contrasts the rationalism of Mary Shelley's upbringing by Godwin with the 'romantic turmoil'[17] of her later life and suggests that 'in *Frankenstein* was mirrored a state of strife between Mary's emotional and her intellectual lives'[18]. She sees this reflected in the novel's combination of gothic horror and scientific romance, elements which in the work of later writers became separated into different

genres. Her comment on Mary Shelley's style, 'The horror produced by Gothicism was dissipated in vapour, but *Frankenstein's* sharp outlines intensified the horror element to a most sinister degree'[19], reveals a preference for clarity and a recognition that it can be more effectively horrifying than the vague mystifications associated with gothic. She sees the significance of the central action of creating the Monster in terms of the conflict between reason and emotion, saying 'we may visualise Frankenstein's doppelganger or Monster firstly as representing reason in isolation, since he is the creature of an obsessional rational effort', and 'After the Monster's "birth", then, Frankenstein is a disintegrated being - an embodiment of emotion and also of imagination minus intellect'[20]. These comments are pertinent and revealing in so far as they refer to Frankenstein, but ignore the powerful emotions expressed by the Monster. The story he tells his creator describes a range of developmental processes in both the realm of emotional experience and intellectual understanding. Muriel Spark's distorted account of the Monster can be interpreted as an indication that the separation of the intellect from emotion is of such concern to her that she is predisposed to see it enacted in Mary Shelley's text.

Some of the biographical comments in *Child of Light* show that Muriel Spark perceives the problem of this separation as particularly acute in woman's experience. She relates it to the problems created by society's expectations, saying of Mary Shelley:

> She was one in whom passion was very strongly restrained, due largely to the inhibiting effect of her early life in an "enlightened" and bleakly rationalistic atmosphere. She was never, like most of her female contemporaries, taught the arts of womanliness, and in an age when men expected women to

> studiously reveal a desire to please them, the increasing substantial seriousness of Mary Shelley's bearing appalled and scared the life out of those friends of earlier, flimsier days.[21]

It is not clear how different she thought expectations of women had become by 1951 and how much projection there is in this account. However, the expectation that women will be emotional rather than intellectual beings explains the increasing identification of the gothic genre with women writers and readers. In this respect it is significant that the defintion of *Frankenstein* as science fiction, a genre traditionally associated with men but seen by Muriel Spark as important to an understanding of the novel, is less common than its definition as gothic.

Rosemary Jackson, too, discusses *Frankenstein* in terms of a split. In her account reason is identified with science and emotion with religion:

> *Frankenstein* marks the establishment of a tradition of disenchanted, secular fantasies, becoming increasingly grotesque and horrific. It is haunted by a loss of absolute meaning.... A vast gap is opened up between knowledge (as scientific investigation and rational enquiry) and gnosis (a knowledge of ultimate truths, a kind of spiritual wisdom), and it is in this gap that the modern fantastic is situated.[22]

One of the ways in which *Not To Disturb* challenges traditional conceptual frameworks is its interrogation of this split, indicating that the rational and spiritual are not necessarily opposed. The servants, who remain in control and 'have kept faithful vigil all night' (p.96) - a statement which implies a favourable comparison with Christ's disciples - are guided by reason. Philip Toynbee reports that Muriel Spark said, 'The point of the book, surely, is that it's very *pro*-servant'[23]. Those characters who display emotion are ineffectual and mostly end up

dead. Clara's comment on the Baroness is pertinent in this context: 'She used to keep her hair frosted or blond-streaked. She shouldn't have let go her shape. Why did she suddenly start to go natural? She must have started to be sincere with someone' (p.35). Implicit here is a contrast between naturalness combined with genuine feeling and artifice combined with intellect. The outcome confirms the opinion that it is a mistake to be swayed by the heart rather than the head.

Another way of gauging where the novel stands is to consider the numerous references to Jacobean drama and analogies between aristocratic characters in *Not To Disturb* and typical protagonists of Jacobean plays. The opening immediately establishes the importance of this connection:

> The other servants fall silent as Lister enters the room.
>
> "Their life," says Lister, "a general mist of error. Their death, a hideous storm of terror. - I quote from *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster, an English dramatist of old. (p.5)

It is appropriate to the democratic emphasis of the novel that Muriel Spark does not rely on the reader recognizing the allusion but has Lister spell it out like a pedantic schoolmaster. Reference to the play implies a negative valuation of emotion in so far as its most impassioned character, Ferdinand, is cruel and depraved. Towards the end of the novel the use of quotation and allusion focuses increasingly on *The Book of Job* and *Ecclesiastes*. Their invocation suggests that all worldly things are vanity, human actions are pre-ordained and the mind of God is impenetrable to human understanding; the only valid response to such a vision of the world is calm acceptance and the performance of one's daily tasks. The romance of melodrama and the glamour of evil are undoubtedly

attractive and account for the appeal of much in Jacobean and gothic literature, but in *Not To Disturb* emotionalism untempered by reason is made to seem both banal and foolish.

A bourgeois, anti-aristocratic bias is identified as endemic to gothic by David Punter. His Marxist approach to the sociological determinants of gothic revival grounds it in class-based tensions, persuasively explaining the preponderance of aristocratic villains as part of 'a myth produced by the middle class to explain its own antecedents and its own fears'[24]. The location of evil in past forms of power and in another social group safely exonerates the currently powerful bourgeoisie. While there is general agreement that gothic represents a desire to break taboos, Punter differs from many others in describing the taboos in social rather than sexual or religious terms:

> Capitalism has specific taboos, or special forms of taboo, just as particular primitive societies vary in their taboo structure: what has been most important during the past two centuries emerges quite clearly from Gothic - the family, the concept of creation and work, the claims of the individual, the power of the repressive apparatus of church and state.[25]

The double action of gothic texts accounts for their particular form of pleasure; they allow for the conceptual release from taboos, but by simultaneously depicting the bearers of such release as "evil" and "other" do not challenge the status quo. It is ultimately more challenging to expose such conventions than to adopt them uncritically.

Rosemary Jackson, like David Punter, sees in gothic fantasy the potential for securing bourgeois ideology: 'troublesome social elements can be destroyed in the name

of exorcising the demonic'[26]. Her preference is evidently for texts which are subversive, and she regrets the 'repeated neutralization' of the capacity for fantasy to construct 'images of impossibility and of desire'[27]. In saying 'fantasy has persistently been silenced, or re-written in transcendental rather than transgressive terms'[28] she sets up an opposition between the transcendental and the subversive text. However, it is arguable that Muriel Spark's introduction of the transcendental is itself subversive; in our culture psychological explanations of evil are more orthodox than the doctrine of original sin. Her strategies reverse the historical trajectory of the genre, defined by Judith Wilt as 'from the language of sin and salvation to the language of character and behavior'[29].

Judith Wilt's discussion of gothic is particularly interesting in relation to its religious implications. She recognizes in gothic an effect of the interconnectedness of orthodoxy and heresy, of action and reaction:

> This rhythm, set up in the sixteenth century, described a movement from orthodoxy to reform powered by humanist and rationalist thought. This movement, however unretractable in the main, constantly generated a powerful counterflow back to the orthodox mysteries, where the simplifications and certainties and civilities of humanism or tolerance, latitudinarianism or deism or later liberalism were perceived as robbing life of some of its richness, nobility, or intensity.[30]

Choosing to engage with the genre of the gothic rather than with classic realism is consistent with the reversion described here. However, to draw on gothic motifs in order to subvert their emotional effectiveness and deny the analogy between their mysteries and those of religion, as *Not To Disturb* succeeds in doing, is to combine orthodoxy and heresy in even more complex patterns than suggested by

Judith Wilt. But this too conforms to Wilt's concept of the function of art:

> Between the automatism of counting beads, repeating the given formulas, and chanting the name of God, and the heresy of creating new things from the broken formulas of the old and chanting the narrative of the multiform self, the artist chooses the heresy. And a heretic ... is not an atheist; rather he maintains a profound and often fruitful link with the orthodoxy that defines his terms.[31]

A consideration of genre helpfully brings out the operation of this combination at the level of narrative discourse. But Wilt also indicates the possibility of tension between concept and discourse, a tension touched on by Robert Kiely in his reference to the 'unnameable', when she says, 'The novelists ... do what they can to guard the mystery of life from the sanities of narrative, even as they show forth the city by means of narrative'[32].

A nice distinction between a "secret" and a "mystery" is provided by Eva Hoffman, who says, 'Mystery only deepens as you go further into it, but secrets give themselves up unto the light'[33]. The so-called 'mysteries' which drive the narratives in conventional detective and gothic stories are, on this definition, more accurately called 'secrets'. Muriel Spark's refusal to play the established games of 'secrets' may be seen as one of her subversive strategies; it is not one that denies, but rather preserves, 'mystery'. In *Not To Disturb* the removal of mystery from the events is accompanied by its transfer to their narration. The major enigma is made explicit when Lister says, 'They have placed themselves, unfortunately, within the realm of predestination' (p.37). There are many other statements which disrupt the chronology we normally take for granted:

"Of course he expected his dinner," Lister says. "But as things turned out he didn't live to eat it. He'll be arriving soon."

"There might be an unexpected turn of events," says Eleanor.

"There was sure to be something unexpected," says Lister. "But what's done is about to be done and the future has come to pass. My memoirs up to the funeral are as a matter of fact more or less complete...." (p.9)

The anarchic discrepancies between the verb tenses mirror the wider discrepancies of chronological order within the novel. On one level Lister's reference to predestination makes sense as a comment on the nature of fiction, for one way to place oneself 'within the realm of predestination' is to be a character in a novel. The present tense narration, with its reminder that the text is a fiction created in the present tense of its composition, reinforces the sense that the characters are trapped inside an artificial construction. The connection between the eternal present of fiction and a transcendental world view is made evident when Lister is counting money:

"Small change," he says, "compared with what is to come, or has already come, according as one's philosophy is temporal or eternal. To all intents and purposes, they're already dead although as a matter of banal fact, the night's business has still to accomplish itself." (p.12)

The conventions of realism rely on an acceptance that there is a reality which exists independently of the text and in which events occur in sequence and cannot be predicted - a secular world. The denial of realism disturbs many readers both because the fictional mode is less familiar and because it posits a world in which all can be known at once, all events occur simultaneously - a theistic world. The disappointment of the conventional

expectation of surprise is more surprising, and indeed alarming, than its fulfilment would have been. The departure from literary convention reflects the 'departure from consensus reality'[34] which makes this text so 'disturbing'.

The irony of the punning title is inescapable. The novel's combination of emotional 'disengagement' with its capacity to 'disturb' places it, along with *The Driver's Seat*, in Kathryn Hume's category 'literature of disillusion'. Nevertheless the two texts are markedly different in effect; whereas they are both ironic in mode, *Not To Disturb* fits into Northrop Frye's mythos of irony and satire. He describes the ironic phase of comedy within this mythos as one which:

> ...takes for granted a world which is full of anomalies, injustices, follies, and crimes, and yet is permanent and undisplaceable. Its principle is that anyone who wishes to keep his balance in such a world must learn first of all to keep his eyes open and his mouth shut.[35]

In this world the servants keep their balance, not so much by keeping their mouths shut as by accepting the world as it is. Just as the house is full of imported components, the text is full of imported fragments of quotation. As these fragments are heaped one upon the other towards the end of the novel, they build a comic vision which corresponds to Bakhtin's concepts of the heteroglossic and the carnivalistic. The servants' press conference quotations culminate in:

> Lister, beside her, addresses another microphone,
> "The glories," he says, "of our blood and state
> Are shadows, not substantial things;
> There is no armour against fate;
> Death lays his icy hand on kings:
> Sceptre and crown

Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scyth and spade." (p.93)[30]

The sweeping away of the power of the aristocrats, with their melodramatic emotions, leads to the democratic world envisioned through carnival. The ascendancy of the servants is accompanied by the calm which follows the storm, reinforced by the final words of the novel: '...while outside the house the sunlight is laughing on the wall' (p.96). Not 'pity and fear', but a sunny restoration of order, the typical conclusion of comedy.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Muriel Spark said of her second novel, 'I was in an adventurous mood and I wrote a desert island story called *Robinson*'[1]. The adventure story belongs with other despised categories but does not even rate a mention in Patrick Parrinder's list of 'sub-genres'. Martin Green has been persuasive in claiming that it is a genre which is worth considering more seriously. His strongest argument is that it engages with issues of power and politics in international contexts: 'The adventure novel has one large advantage in seriousness, in that it deals with that body of historical fact which Simone Weil called "force"'[2]. He opposes adventure stories to 'domestic' novels, or 'novels of courtship', which have been comparatively favourably received by critics, and says:

> This disregard was to their advantage, in so far as they were the emerging myth of empire; myths have to be absorbed uncritically if they are to act upon large numbers of people, so have to present themselves as mere pastimes, juvenile pleasures, idle dreams.[3]

As he indicates, such stories tend to reflect prevailing ideology, which is one reason why a critical orthodoxy that privileges subversive texts refuses to take them seriously. It also means that they provide a body of texts which is eminently suitable for parodic or deconstructive treatment, hence the continuing production of variations on the story of *Robinson Crusoe*.

Muriel Spark is uninhibited about the pleasure of narrative. She said of her childhood reading, 'I was especially fond of Robert Louis Stevenson's novels of adventure'[4], and of her enjoyment of John Masefield's work:

> I ... was especially enthusiastic about the narrative poems of John Masefield especially *Reynard the Fox* and *Dauber*. I still think these stories in verse are marvellous, and I love his adventure novels.[4]

In her book on Masefield she disassociates herself from critical snobbishness as well as from phoney popularism, repudiating the use of both "intellectual" and "popular" as terms of abuse[5]. Her novels have never conformed to the types defined by Martin Green as traditionally considered "serious"; only *The Mandelbaum Gate* has a marriage at the end, and here the sentence, 'Barbara and Henry were married and got along fairly well together ever after' (p.303), mocks the conventional happy ending; in any case it concludes only one of the narrative threads and not the whole novel. Unsnobbish pleasure in story-telling is evident in *Robinson*; the relish for its adventure story genre extends to such details as the inclusion of a map of the island. John Glavin celebrates Muriel Spark's enthusiastic engagement with pre-existing texts when he refers to her 'assured, joyful, and generous rescripting', contrasting this with Harold Bloom's account of literary filiation as 'desperate' and 'agonistic'[6].

The references signalled by the novel's title are compounded by giving the island the same name as its inhabitant, thus constructing this 'Robinson' as self, place and genre. It is because of this combination that I decided to focus on *Robinson* in drawing together some of the threads which have emerged from consideration of individual novels. Critical discussions of *Robinson* have tended to emphasize the concept of self. There is general agreement that the novel is best read as an allegory and this has been widely interpreted in psychological terms. Carol Ohmann's account is echoed by others: 'Interpreted allegorically, Robinson, Jimmie, and Tom Wells function as representations of January's superego, ego, and id'[7].

While the detailed working through of this reading is plausible, it leaves other ways in which the text operates relatively unexplored. A critic who is unusual in finding the novel praiseworthy, Alan Bold, sees in it a 'religious allegory'[8]. Certainly the emphasis on Robinson's religious views supports his interpretation. And it is impossible to avoid endowing with special significance the novel's repeated references to numbers, and particularly to the number three. It is interesting that so many critics have gone along with the trio of 'superego, ego, and id', and paid comparatively little attention to the obvious religious connotation, perhaps because the roles of Father, Son and Holy Ghost cannot be made to fit the three men in the story. However, Robinson's 'anti-Marian fervour' is a reminder that the female figure of Mary is outside the male Trinity, just as January is the only woman on the island with the three men. Norman Page makes an interesting comment on the 'numerological patterns' in *The Driver's Seat*, one which may be applied to the even more insistent patterning of *Robinson* - 'the world of mathematics also reassures us that we do not inhabit a universe that is wholly random and unpredictable'[9]. This is one of the ways in which the novel, like others by Muriel Spark, integrates the spiritual with other facets of experience through the interplay of a range of texts.

To focus on the island story as genre is a valuable, as well as a relatively neglected, way of exploring the intertextual resonances of *Robinson*. It is interesting that Pierre Macherey chose the motif of the island, and in particular Jules Verne's treatment of this motif, as an example of the relation between an existing body of texts and a new one. His comment that a 'book is furrowed by the allusive presence of those other books against which it is elaborated'[10] is pertinent to the concept of intertextuality in general, and hence to the relation

between Muriel Spark's novels and genre conventions. He articulates the crucial distinction between considering 'the utilisation of the theme' and 'the meaning that the theme actually acquires within the work'[11] which is generally accepted within theories of intertextuality[12]. The writer's 'utilisation of the theme', developed through many previous versions, is conspicuous in *Robinson*. Several features of its plot occur in Jules Verne's story, but the colonial cooperative spirit and work ethic of his text is completely overturned in Muriel Spark's version, where the pessimism about innate human goodness is more akin to William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, published just four years before *Robinson*. And there are interesting parallels with Jean Giraudoux's *Suzanne et le Pacifique* whose female castaway cultivates the aesthetic pleasures of the body and of nature rather than the soil; this text explicitly mocks the Protestant work ethic and utilitarian values of the first Robinson, who, it says, 'speaks of the flavour of every one of the island's birds and never of its song'[13]. Not to situate *Robinson* within its genre context would clearly be to miss a major part of its potential meaning.

For Muriel Spark's Robinson, as for Suzanne, the island is a place for meditation, not cultivation. However, his failure to grow produce is represented as an aesthetic failure; the grounds for the irritation this causes are consistent with the privileging of the artificial over the natural throughout Muriel Spark's oeuvre:

> ...the lack of cultivation on the island was a continual irritation to me. It was not simply that it offended some instinct for economy and reproduction. It was more; it offended my aesthetic sense. If you choose the sort of life which has no conventional pattern you have to try and make an art of it, or it is a mess. (p.84)

Robinson's failure to cultivate also forms part of a pattern of contrasts between male and female principles, a contrast which takes other forms elsewhere in Muriel Spark's novels. January's impulse to worship the moon is associated with paganism and has connotations of earth goddesses, fertility and reproduction:

> I was the only woman on the island, and it is said the pagan mind runs strong in women at any time, let alone on an island, and such an island. It is not only the moon, the incident, that I am thinking of. I consider now how my perceptions during that whole period were touched with a pre-ancestral quality, how there was an enchantment, a primitive blood-force which probably moved us all. (p.9)

The link between women and fertility in *Robinson* is seen by Judy Little as part of a complex pattern which connects the pomegranate orchards, significantly growing on the 'head' of the island (the only part of the 'self' of Robinson which he cultivates), with the *Song of Solomon*:

> Jung in his *Answer to Job* ... quotes one of these passages and offers it as an image for the feminine "Wisdom," or "Sophia," who is elsewhere described in Scripture in terms very similar to those applied to the Holy Spirit.[14]

The long-established association of female wisdom with the abundance of nature is used in the novel; however, the conventional identification of the island as female is undercut to the extent that in this instance it represents an external manifestation of its owner's masculine identity rather than an object for him to both cherish and dominate. He has, however, planted a field of mustard, 'for effect' (p.32), which through its colour parallels the associations with gold, the sun, and masculinity which also operate in *The Takeover*. The brilliance of its colour contrasts with the other vivid colours of the text - the blue and green water and the red blood - emphasizing the

notion of the island as a "primitive" return to a fresh world of greater clarity, identified with the origins of the race as well as the individual. In this it conforms to the convention of the desert island story which, typically, represents a return to origins, to a more primitive mode of existence which is deemed to reveal the essential in human nature.

Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose* includes a conversation which helps to identify the concern with origins as something more than sentimental nostalgia or mystification. In a discussion about the concept of the unicorn William says:

> The unicorn, as these books speak of him, embodies a moral truth, or allegorical, or analogical, but one that remains true, as the idea that chastity is a noble virtue remains true. But as for the literal truth that sustains the other three truths, we have yet to see what original experience gave birth to the letter.[15]

A concern with mythology and anthropology can, as this passage indicates, be an attempt to delve beneath the sign in order to understand what motivated its formation. This in turn enables present ideas and images to be more fully comprehended. Jacques Derrida explained deconstruction in similar terms when he spoke at Oxford University in 1992[16]. He denied that deconstruction implied 'dissolution'; instead, he argued, its goal is to establish the genealogy of a concept, delving into its history in order to understand its application in the present. Far from endorsing a negative view of deconstruction, he stressed its importance in enabling the formation of new *constructions*, ones which would acknowledge the *other*, and would therefore contribute to beneficial changes in thinking. His account may helpfully be applied to the concern with origins and the

interrogation of mythological images in Muriel Spark's novels.

The patterning of images in *Robinson* gives a 'pre-ancestral' perspective to the conflict about power and gender which it depicts. Margaret Moan Rowe comments:

> The mind game played by Robinson and January is far more consequential than the sexual game which seems to occupy the plane's survivors. The issue between Robinson and January is power - whose view will dominate.[17]

It is characteristic of Muriel Spark that the power represented by intellectual dominance is more significant than the power of sexuality, and that the feminine principle should relate to Earth goddesses and the *Song of Solomon*, not seduction. An objection to the solipsist life represented by Robinson, with his reliance on masculine reason stripped of emotion and aesthetic sensibility, is stated unequivocally by January: 'There's no such thing as a private morality' (p.161). In an essay on *Between the Acts* Gillian Beer writes, 'The slow flux of land-shifts described in the book repeatedly reminds the reader that islands are formed, not originary'[18]. *Robinson* reminds us that people, and texts, are formed too. The concept that selves are constructed and known through action and performance, which runs through Muriel Spark's novels, can be related to Bernard Harrison's account of Derrida and the self:

> His whole enterprise is to demonstrate that logocentrism is connected with a Cartesian notion of the self, as prior to and fully known before utterance, and that rejection of both does not entail rejection of any coherent "self" or of any relation to extra-textual "Reality". By arguing for a self that acts and utters, and through doing so makes itself knowable, and comes to construct itself, he argues for a self that is

> responsible for its own texts and is to be found in them, but is not static.[19]

An acceptance that selves are formed through contact with an external world parallels the acknowledgement that texts, too, are not 'originary' but are constructed through engagement with intertexts.

A connection is evident between the rejection of Romanticism, with its privileging of false notions of originality, and Muriel Spark's statement about her religion, 'I'm quite sure that my conversion gave me something to work on as a satirist. The Catholic belief is a norm from which one can depart'[20]. One value of a literary convention is that it, too, is a norm from which one can depart. Julia Kristeva's denial that Christianity can be anything other than authoritarian is at odds with the challenging of orthodoxy in Muriel Spark's novels. In her discussion of the carnivalesque Kristeva writes:

> In the Middle Ages, Menippean tendencies were held in check by the authority of the religious text; in the bourgeois era, they were contained by the absolutism of individuals and things.[21]

It is possible to see a hint in this of the potential for religion to perform a subversive function in a bourgeois age, countering the dominance of individualism and thereby contributing to dialogism. But crucial to this is the word 'depart'; a doctrinaire, authoritarian stance is precisely how Bakhtin defines the monologic. In her first novel Muriel Spark explored relations between her religious beliefs and the writing of fiction. *The Comforters* asserts that there is a distinction between the contrivances of fiction and the 'real form' of God's plots, and throughout her novels the contrivances of human texts are open to interrogation. However, Caroline Rose's apparent conclusion that an 'artificial plot' may be compatible with 'real form' (p.105) indicates that the novelist sees

in fiction a means of engaging with 'extra-textual "reality"'.

An attempt to locate in *Robinson* characteristics it shares with other novels by Muriel Spark carries with it the danger of underestimating their differences. A notable feature of her novels is their variety; she says of John Masefield, 'Like most authors, Mr Masefield is at his best when, having done one thing well, he next does something quite different'[22], and this would appear to be a comment on her own aspiration, as well as on her achievement. Nevertheless, several of the motifs and strategies deployed in her second novel recur in subsequent texts, albeit in a less concentrated and schematic form. Its simultaneous acceptance and transformation of a popular genre, and its playful construction of elaborate patterns in which different kinds of texts intertwine, are features which appear throughout her oeuvre. The complexity of the engagement of her novels with intertexts necessarily means that this study cannot be comprehensive, but the selection should at least serve as an indication of the effects achieved by the particular configurations within individual novels.

One question that has persisted throughout this exploration is what limits, if any, there are to the endless proliferation of meanings in Muriel Spark's texts. This is linked to the question of whether a deconstructive reading is a critical endeavour that goes against the grain of a Catholic novelist's enterprise. Patricia Waugh's definition of two extremes in the concept of metafiction is useful in relation to these questions:

> What has to be acknowledged is that there are two poles of metafiction: one that finally accepts a substantial real world whose significance is not entirely composed of relationships within language; and one that suggests

there can never be an escape from the prisonhouse of language and either delights or despairs in this.[23]

Muriel Spark's novels indicate two kinds of extra-textual reality: the dimension of physical, bodily fact - exemplified by Annabel's body which has produced the baby, Carl, in *The Public Image* - and the realm of mystery associated with the God of *Job*; both form part of the 'eternal life' so lyrically evoked in *The Takeover*. However, the novels also make clear that our understanding is in all cases dependent on texts and, consequently, that fiction is able to deal only with textuality. Hence their participation in, rather than resistance to, deconstructive explorations of meaning.

Bernard Harrison argues that deconstruction is central to the whole of literature. He sees the impossibility of any *hors-texte* as a crucial determinant of the literary function:

> ...it makes us aware of the gap between Reality and the conceptual-cum-theoretical constructions which we habitually and with varying degrees of warrant, success and durability attempt to place upon it. The object of theory is to close this gap...; the object of literature is to keep the gap open.
>
> That such a gap exists and is unclosable is, of course, the central insight of deconstruction.[24]

But it is through texts that the concept of a gap is constructed and this entails the idea of a "reality" external to texts. Northrop Frye's use of the word 'anagogical' may be linked to the capacity of texts to evoke what they cannot name:

> Anagogically, then, poetry unites total ritual, or unlimited social action, with total dream, or unlimited individual thought. Here the *dianoia* of art is no longer a *mimesis logon*, but the Logos, the shaping word

> which is both reason and, as Goethe's Faust speculated, *praxis* or creative act.[25]

Patricia Waugh includes Muriel Spark in a group of writers who, she claims, 'suggest that "reality" exists *beyond* "text" certainly, but may only be reached *through* "text"'[26]. The emphasis on "text" is reiterated by Christopher Norris who, like Umberto Eco, stresses that interpretation is a valid activity which has to take the text as its point of departure: 'Deconstruction is not a matter of mere critical gamesmanship precisely because it uses - *can* only use - the figural leads and devices advanced by the text itself'[27].

Muriel Spark's commitment to satire as an 'honourable weapon'[28] is a further indication that for her writing is not a self-enclosed game. The ridiculing of what is perceived to be wrong presupposes a vision of an alternative and better morality, and one that is deemed worth fighting for. This is evident in the engagement of her texts in contestations over power and their willingness to make choices. But in this respect, too, not all her texts work in the same way; the bleakness of the tragic irony of a novel like *The Driver's Seat* contrasts with the satiric comedy which predominates in her oeuvre. Even here, however, the strategies employed to surprise the reader include humour, and humour constitutes one of the means whereby an audience may be encouraged to entertain possibilities which undermine a 'hasty epistemic confidence'[29]. It is a form of provocation that includes pleasure, taking its part alongside the narrative satisfactions Muriel Spark's novels allow the reader. Her commitment to 'startle as well as to please'[30] is an indication of optimism about the human potential for change and the capacity of fiction to provoke thought through challenging conventionalized expectations. If texts are powerful enough to construct our conception of

the world, her novels assert that they are powerful enough to change it.

NOTES

Notes to chapter one: Introduction

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Notes to chapter two: The text of God or God as text

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2.2 *The Only Problem*

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12 JUNG, ref. 5, p.376-377.

13 It is helpful to compare Erich Auerbach's comments on the Old Testament with the other readings referred to in this chapter. His recognition of the fictional construction of God is worth noting here: 'The concept of God held by the Jews is less a cause than a symptom of their manner of comprehending and representing things'. AUERBACH, E. *Mimesis: the representation of mystery in Western literature* (1946), trans. W. Trask (1953). Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1957, p.6.

14 HARRISON, B. *Inconvenient Fictions: literature and the limits of theory*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991, p.183.

15 JOSIPOVICI, G. *The Book Of God: a response to the Bible*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

16 JOSIPOVICI, ref. 15, p.48-49.

17 KERMODE, F. *The Sense Of An Ending*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968.

18 MARTIN, W. *Recent Theories Of Narrative*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1986, p.74.

19 SPARK, ref. 4, p.7.

20 SPARK, M. The Religion of an Agnostic. In *Church of England Newspaper*, 27 November 1953, p.1.

21 Such culturally perpetuated texts need have no basis in evidence; it is interesting, but in no way disruptive of cultural myth, that according to a report in the *Times Literary Supplement* of 9 October 1992, '55 per cent of Britons read at least one book a month, compared with only 32 per cent in France' and on average Britons spend £43 per head on books each year compared to £37 for the French. This information comes from the *Publishers Association Trade Year Book* for 1992, quoted in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 October 1992.

22 There is another reason for the chosen location: the existence of the painting by Georges de la Tour in the museum at Epinal. While the relevance of this to the novel is beyond question, I have not mentioned it at this point in the text as it is not a cultural construction but a geographical fact.

23 BOLD, A. *Muriel Spark*. London & New York: Methuen, 1986, p.116.

24 BOLD, ref. 23, p.117.

25 FRYE, ref. 7, p.197.

26 KIERKEGAARD, S. *The Journals Of Søren Kierkegaard*, a selection ed. & trans. A. Dru. London: Oxford University Press, 1938, p.451, entry 1233, 1851.

27 KIERKEGAARD, ref. 26, p.451, entry 1233.

28 SPARK, M. Bang-bang You're Dead. In *Bang-bang You're Dead And Other Stories*. London, Toronto, Sydney & New York: Granada, 1982, p.16.

29 HARRISON, ref. 14, p.169.

30 JUNG, ref. 5, p.375.

31 JUNG, ref. 5, p.369.

32 HUTCHEON, L. *Narcissistic Narrative: the metafictional paradox* (1980). New York and London: Methuen, 1984, p.xv-xvi.

33 JOSIPOVICI, ref. 15, p.289.

34 MURDOCH, I. Existentialists and mystics: a note on the novel in the new utilitarian age. In *Essays And Poems Presented To Lord David Cecil*, ed. W. W. Robson. London: Constable, 1970, p.175.

35 HARRISON, ref. 14, p.11.

36 I have observed that Muriel Spark's prose is generally more understated in her fiction than in her critical writing. This accords with the openness of her fictional texts in contrast to the relatively closed and assertive nature of her criticism, and particularly of her editorials where the tendency to adopt a polemical stance justifies a corresponding vigour of argument.

37 SPARK, M. *The Poetry Review*, Dec. 1947, vol. 38, no. 6, p.403.

38 *Isaiah*, chapter 14, verse 12.

39 POTTER, B. *The Tale Of Jemima Puddle-duck*. London: Frederick Warne & Co., 1908, p.26.

40 HUGHES, R. *Heaven And Hell In Western Art*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, p. 252.

41 HUGHES, ref. 40, p.242.

42 *Job*, chapter 2, verses 8-10.

43 A comment by Erich Auerbach relates interestingly to the emphasis on the domestic in the painting and the novel; he says, '...from the very first, in the Old Testament stories, the sublime, tragic, and problematic take shape precisely in the domestic and commonplace...'. *Mimesis*, ref. 13, p.19.

44 LITTLE, J. *Comedy And The Woman Writer: Woolf, Spark and feminism*. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983, p.101.

45 *Job*, chapter 42, verse 13.

46 SPARK, M. *John Masefield* (1953). London: Macmillan, 1962, p.156.

47 HARRISON, ref. 14, p.183.

48 KIERKEGAARD, ref. 26, p.219, entry 696, 1847.

2.3 *The Mandelbaum Gate*

1 *The Revelation Of St John The Divine*, chapter 3, verses 15 & 16.

2 ISER, W. *The Act Of Reading* (1976). Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, p.69.

3 ISER, ref. 2, p.81.

4 JOSIPOVICI, G. *The Book Of God: a response to the Bible*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, p.141.

5 JOSIPOVICI, ref. 4, p.148.

6 BARTHES, R. *Mythologies* (1957), trans. A. Lavers (1972). London, Toronto, Sydney & New York: Granada, 1973, p.76.

7 BARTHES, ref. 6, p.76.

8 WHITTAKER, R. *The Faith And Fiction Of Muriel Spark*. London: Macmillan, 1982, p.75.

9 DIPPLE, E. *The Unresolvable Plot: reading contemporary fiction*. London & New York: Routledge, 1988, p.150.

10 Ian Gillham reports that Muriel Spark told him in an interview, 'I don't like that book awfully much, actually. Towards the end, it's more like my other books: it races. It's out of proportion: the beginning is very slow, the end is very rapid. ...I got bored because it was too long, so I decided never again to write a long book. Keep them short.' GILLHAM, I. Keeping it short - Muriel Spark talks about her books to Ian Gillham. In *The Listener*, 24 September 1970, p.412.

11 DIPPLE, ref. 9, p.152.

12 KERMODE, F. Muriel Spark. In *Continuities*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968, p.209.

13 KERMODE, F. Muriel Spark. In *Modern Essays*. London: Fontana, 1971, p.279.

14 CLOUGH, A. H. *Amours De Voyage*, canto 2, stanza 4, lines 68-69.

15 CLOUGH, A. H. *Amours De Voyage*, canto 5, stanza 5, lines 84-85. In *The Poems Of Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. A. L. P. Norrington. London: Oxford University Press, 1968, p.216.

16 CLOUGH, ref. 15, canto 2, stanza 4, lines 64-71, p.189.

17 SPARK, M. Review of *The Poems Of Arthur Hugh Clough* ed. H. F. Lowry, A. L. P. Norrington & F. L. Mulhauser. In *Poetry Quarterly*, Summer 1952, vol. 14, no. 2, p.60.

18 ELIOT, T. S. Little Gidding, lines 150-156. In *Four Quartets*. London: Faber & Faber, 1959, p.55.

19 SPARK, M. Review of *The Canticle Of The Rose*, Edith Sitwell; *Collected Poems*, Louis Macneice; *The Pythoness*, Kathleen Raine. In *Poetry Quarterly*, Winter 1949, vol. 11, no. 4, p.254.

20 SPARK, M. Editorial: Reassessment. In *The Poetry Review*, April-May 1948, vol. 39, no. 2, p. 104.

21 SPARK, ref. 20, p.103.

22 *The Cloud Of Unknowing*, trans. into modern English by C. Walters. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, p.69.

23 *St Luke*, chapter 9, verses 34 & 35.

24 *The Cloud Of Unknowing*, ref. 22, p.58.

25 SPARK, M. The Mystery of Job's Suffering (Jung's new interpretation examined). In *Church of England Newspaper*, 15 April 1955, p.7.

26 FROW, J. see chapter one, ref. 36.

27 TOYNBEE, P. In *Observer Colour Supplement*, 7 Nov. 1971, p.73.

28 Stereotypical conceptions of the "spinster" are deconstructed during the course of the novel, principally through the gap which is established between the perception of Barbara by others and her private behaviour and sensuality. The treatment of Ricky comically exaggerates the idea of a gap between staid appearance and licentious capacity, and the initial suggestion that she is a mannish lesbian gives way to a representation of her as heterosexually passionate. Her affair with Joe Ramdez is described as, 'a serious relationship and no mere spinster's holiday fling' (p.242). Both depictions exact revenge on behalf of schoolmistress spinsters for the facile judgements made of them. Although she is thirty-three and unmarried, Suzi Ramdez defies categorization as a spinster; her self-reliance and frank sexual generosity also counter the image of the oriental woman as veiled, powerless and mysterious. Like Barbara and Ricky, she is married off at the end. By contrast, the brief reference to Freddy's 'virgin cousin' (p.54), with her sentimental flower-planting, exploits rather than resists the downtrodden, repressed stereotype.

29 LODGE, D. *The Novelist At The Crossroads*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971, p.139.

30 LODGE, ref. 29, p.139.

31 LODGE, ref. 29, p.130.

32 SPARK, M. What Images Return (First pub. *New Statesman*). In *Memoirs Of A Modern Scotland*, ed. K. Miller. London: Faber & Faber, 1970, p.153.

33 SPARK, ref. 32, p.153.

34 *Ecclesiastes*, chapter 9, verse 11.

35 *Ecclesiastes*, chapter 9, verse 9.

36 DANTE ALIGHIERI *The Divine Comedy: Paradiso*, trans. C. S. Singleton. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975, canto 33, line 81, p.377.

37 DANTE, ref. 36, lines 82-93.

38 CURTIUS, E.R. *European Literature And The Latin Middle Ages* (1948), trans. W. R. Trask. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953, p.332.

Notes to chapter three: versions of the self

3.2 *The Public Image*

1 WOOLF, V. *To The Lighthouse* (1927). London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1963, p.215.

2 WOOLF, V. Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown. In *Collected Essays: vol. 1* (1966). London: Hogarth Press, 1980, p.331.

3 HASKELL, M. *From Reverence To Rape: the treatment of women in the movies* (1973). London: New English Library, 1975, p.vi.

4 EAGLETON, T. *Literary Theory: an introduction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983, p.133.

5 TOYNBEE, P. In *Observer Colour Supplement*, 7 Nov. 1971, p.73.

6 DYER, R. *Stars*. London: BFI, 1979.

7 FISKE, J. & HARTLEY, J. *Reading Television*. London & New York: Methuen, 1978, p.107

8 ANG, I. *Watching Dallas: soap opera and the melodramatic imagination* (1982), trans. D. Couling (1985). London: Routledge, 1989, p.134.

9 FISKE & HARTLEY, ref. 7, p.80.

10 DYER, ref. 6, p.183.

11 POUND, E. *Selected Poems*. London: Faber & Faber, 1959, p.124.

12 *St Matthew*, chapter 26, verse 52.

13 DYER, ref. 6, p.158.

14 MODLESKI, T. *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and feminist theory*. New York & London: Methuen, 1988,

p.34. The distinction between 'drama' and 'theatre' makes sense only if applied to two modes of theatrical or filmic performance or to different genres. The difficulty of classifying film genres is evident from current video catalogues; their use of the word 'drama' for any "serious" film which cannot be fitted into another generic category is pertinent to Tania Modleski's argument.

15 KENNEDY, A. *The Protean Self: dramatic action in contemporary fiction*. London: Macmillan, 1974, p.200.

16 KENNEDY, ref. 15, p.193.

17 KENNEDY, ref. 15, p.200-201.

18 *Paris Match*, 22 April 1967, p.85 & 29 April 1967, p.86.

19 *Paris Match*, 16 Sept. 1967, p.64-5.

20 LORD, G. The love letters that Muriel Spark refused to buy. In *Sunday Express*, 4 March 1973, p.6.

21 DE LAURETIS, T. *Alice Doesn't: feminism, semiotics, cinema*. London: Macmillan, 1984.

22 MULVEY, L. Visual pleasure and narrative cinema. In *Screen*, Autumn 1975, vol. 16, no. 3, p.14.

23 DE LAURETIS, ref. 21, p.134.

24 DE LAURETIS, ref. 21, p.137.

25 *Paris Match*, 17 June 1967, p.100.

26 BARTHES, R. *Mythologies* (1957), trans. A. Lavers (1972). London Toronto, Sydney & New York: Granada, 1973, p.32.

27 KIELY, R. *The Romantic Novel In England*. Cambridge Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1972, p.22.

28 SCHICKEL, R. *Common Fame: the culture of celebrity*. London: Pavilion/Michael Joseph, 1985, p.265.

29 The argument here may appear to contradict the importance given to action, but there is a distinction between morality *predicated* on social behaviour and morality which is *manifested* through social action. Both writers challenge norms of polite, conventional behaviour, but this does not lead them to assert the validity of a private morality.

30 WILSON, E. *Adorned In Dreams: fashion and modernity*. London: Virago, 1985, p.231.

31(a) MCBRIEN, W. Muriel Spark: the novelist as dandy. In *Twentieth Century Women Novelists*, ed. T. F. Staley. London: Macmillan, 1982, p.153.
31(b) John Mortimer has written that Muriel Spark included Max Beerbohm among the writers that she read after winning the *Observer* short story competition: '...I took three months off and read Proust and Max Beerbohm and Cardinal Newman'. MORTIMER, J. The culture of an anarchist. In *Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, 20 March 1988.
31(c) I will return to the concept of fiction as 'parable' in section 3.4 of this chapter.

32 DE LAURETIS, ref. 21, p.156.

33 WAUGH, P. *Feminine Fictions: revisiting the postmodern*. London & New York: Routledge, 1989, p.14.

3.3 *The Hothouse By The East River*

1 SAINT AUGUSTINE *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961, p.55.

2 PAGE, N. *Muriel Spark*. Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1990, p.86.

3 An indication of the potential interest of a more extended comparison is given by the following quotation from the Epilogue to *V.*, with its remarkable verbal similarities to *The Hothouse By The East River*: '"If there is any political moral to be found in this world," Stencil once wrote in his journal, "it is that we carry on the business of this century with an intolerable double vision. Right and Left; the hothouse and the street. The Right can only live and work hermetically, in the hothouse of the past, while outside the Left prosecute their affairs in the streets by manipulated mob violence. And cannot live but in the dreamscape of the future...."' PYNCHON, T. *V.* (1961). London: Pan Books, 1975, p.468.

4 SPARK, M. The Desegregation of Art. In *Proceedings Of The American Academy Of Arts And Letters*, 1971, p.26.

5 SPARK, M. Introduction to Wordsworth and his Twentieth Century Critics. In *Tribute To Wordsworth: a miscellany of opinion for the centenary of the poet's death*, ed. M. Spark & D. Stanford. London: Wingate, 1950, p.134.

6 SPARK, M. *Child Of Light: a reassessment of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*. Essex: Tower Bridge Publications, 1951, p.193.

7 SPARK, M. Reassessment 2. In *The Poetry Review*, Aug-Sept 1948, vol. 39, no. 3, p.235.

8 SPARK, ref. 7, p.236.

9 WHITTAKER, R. *The Faith And Fiction Of Muriel Spark*. London: Macmillan, 1982, p.26.

10 BROOKE-ROSE, C. *A Rhetoric Of The Unreal: studies in narrative and structure, especially of the fantastic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p.112.

11 BROOKE-ROSE, ref. 10, p.185.

12 DE LAURETIS, T. *Alice Doesn't: feminism, semiotics, cinema*. London: Macmillan, 1984, p.125.

13 WRIGHT, E. *Psychoanalytic Criticism: theory in practice*. London & New York: Methuen, 1984, p.177.

14 WRIGHT, ref. 13, p.179.

15 The play on the word 'shadow' is worth noting here. It functions primarily as a pun since Garven's portrayal resists identification with the ideas of death and mystery ultimately associated with the 'shadow'. However, it is an additional indication of Paul's difficulty in coming to terms with the existence and significance of 'shadows'.

16 WARD, J. *Alain Resnais Or The Theme Of Time*. London: Secker & Warburg in ass. with BFI, 1968, p.122.

17 WARD, ref. 16, p.8.

18 John Ward acknowledges in a footnote (ref. 16, p.11) Proust's denial that 'The distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory is the basis for Bergson's influence on Proust', but also affirms the evident connection between their theories of memory.

19 WARD, ref. 16, p.11.

20 SPARK, M. The Religion of an Agnostic. In *Church of England Newspaper*, 27 November 1953, p.1.

21 The tone of 'insufferable' is interesting; it has connotations of preciosity and conveys impatience with the posture of the aesthete, and possibly also with the chronic invalidism which confined the writer to a well-heated interior.

22 *Ecclesiastes*, chapter 3, verses 1 & 2.

23 ROSE, J. *The Case Of Peter Pan Or The Impossibility Of Children's Literature*. Basingstoke & London: Macmillan, 1984, p.19.

24 BARRIE, J. M. *Peter Pan In Kensington Gardens* (1906) & *Peter And Wendy* (1911), ed. P. Hollindale. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, p.78.

25 BARRIE, ref. 24, p.90.

26 BARRIE, ref. 24, p.91.

27 Because of Muriel Spark's interest in Jungian theory, the possible relevance of the concept of 'the shadow', which is explained in *Aion*, is worth considering. Jung defines the shadow in both personal and archetypal terms, and comments that recognition of its archetypal aspect presents greater difficulty: '... it is quite within the bounds of possibility for a man to recognize the relative evil of his nature, but it is a rare and shattering experience for him to gaze into the face of absolute evil'. While the personal aspect may be less of a threat, it is still not easy to come to terms with it, according to Jung: 'The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real'. This might be thought pertinent to Paul's difficulty in accepting the existence of Elsa's shadow, but such a reading would contradict the identification of the shadow with the 'cloud of unknowing' and consequently with divine mystery and death rather than with evil. It would also accentuate the importance of Paul at the expense of the semblance of autonomy accorded to Elsa within the narrative. For these reasons I have not dealt with Jung's theory in the text. However, the stress on 'absolute evil' is of interest in relation to Muriel Spark's continual emphasis on the existence of sin and evil. JUNG, C. G. *Aion: researches into the phenomenology of the self*, vol. 9, part 2 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. Sir H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler; trans. R. F. C. Hull. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1968 (2nd ed.), p.10 & p.8.

28 MASSIE, A. *Muriel Spark*. Edinburgh: The Ramsay Head Press, 1979, p.12.

29 BARRIE, ref. 24, chapter 3.

30 SHAKESPEARE, W. *Twelfth Night*, act 2, scene 4, lines 51-54.

31 GLAVIN, J. Muriel Spark's *unknowing* fiction. In *Last Laughs: perspectives on women and comedy*, ed. R. Barreca.

New York, London, Paris, Montreux, Tokyo & Melbourne: Gordon & Breach, 1988, p.230.

32 GLAVIN, ref. 31, p.223-224.

33 GLAVIN, ref. 31, p.233.

34 The reference to Edgar Allan Poe's story, 'The Tell-Tale Heart', is introduced because of the prevalence in Poe's oeuvre of images of live burial and of the fear of entrapment.

35 LITTLE, J. *Comedy And The Woman Writer: Woolf, Spark and feminism*. Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983, p.163.

36 ROSE, ref. 23, p.4.

37 SPARK, ref. 4, p.24.

38 WHITTAKER, ref. 9, p.80.

39 SPARK, ref. 4, p.25.

40 KEMP, P. *Muriel Spark*. London: Paul Elek, 1974, p.145.

41 KEMP, ref. 40, p.147.

3.4 *Loitering With Intent*

1 HARRISON, B. *Inconvenient Fictions: literature and the limits of theory*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1991, p.242.

2 SPARK, M. My conversion. In *Twentieth Century*, Autumn 1961, vol. 170, no. 1011, p.63.

3 MARIN, L. On the interpretation of ordinary language: a parable of Pascal. In *Textual Strategies: perspectives in post-structuralist criticism*, ed. J. V. Harari. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979, p.259.

4 WHITTAKER, R. *The Faith And Fiction Of Muriel Spark*. London: Macmillan, 1982, p.18.

5 BARTHES, R. The death of the author. In *Image-Music-Text*, trans. S. Heath. London: Fontana, 1977, p.142-148.

6 FOUCAULT, M. What is an author. In *Textual Strategies: perspectives in post-structuralist criticism*, ed. J. V. Harari. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979. p.143.

7 FOUCAULT, ref. 6, p.144-145.

8 The terminology here is taken from Chatman, S. *Story And Discourse: narrative structure in fiction and film* . Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1978.

9 SAID, E. The text, the world, the critic. In *Textual Strategies: perspectives in post-structuralist criticism*, ed. J. V. Harari. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979, p.171.

10 CULLER, J. *Structuralist Poetics: structuralism, linguistics and the study of literature*. London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, p.203.

11 SPARK, ref. 2, p.62.

12 CELLINI, B. *The Autobiography Of*, trans. G. Bull. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956, p.53.

13 KENNEDY, A. *The Protean Self: dramatic action in contemporary fiction*. London: Macmillan, 1974, p.25.

14 KENNEDY, ref. 13, p.23.

15 *St Luke*, chapter 2, verse 49.

16 MACDONELL, A. Introduction. In *The Life Of Benvenuto Cellini Written By Himself*, trans. A. Macdonell. London: J. M. Dent & Co, 1903, p.xxi-xxii.

17 NEWMAN, J. H. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864). London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1890, p.4.

18 NEWMAN, ref. 17, p.xxii.

19 DRABBLE, M. *The Millstone*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1965, p.107.

20 DRABBLE, ref. 19, p.109.

21 The distinction between sin and crime recurs in Muriel Spark's oeuvre from *The Comforters* onwards. This first novel also establishes a distinction between the moral seriousness of different crimes, blackmail as a crime against people being shown as more serious than smuggling, a crime against the state's property. Father Jerome's question, 'Doesn't it depend on how you take it?' (p.62), has a multiple applicability within the novel. It is pertinent to the differing attitudes to crime portrayed, and even more to the concepts of sin, for they are seen to depend on ways of 'taking things' and sinful actions to emanate from false understanding.

22 HART, F. R. *The Scottish Novel: a critical survey*. London: John Murray, 1978, p.303.

23 STANFORD, D. *Muriel Spark: a biographical and critical study*. Fontwell: Centaur Press, 1963, p.108.

24 DIPPLE, E. *The Unresolvable Plot: reading contemporary fiction*. London & New York: Routledge, 1988, p.150.

25 BRADBURY, M. Muriel Spark's fingernails. In *Critical Quarterly*, Autumn 1972, vol. 14, no. 3, p.145.

26 STUBBS, P. Two contemporary views on fiction: Iris Murdoch and Muriel Spark. In *English*, Autumn 1974, vol. 23, p.109-110.

27 STANFORD, ref. 23, p.116.

28 STANFORD, ref. 23, p.134.

29 SAID, ref. 9, p.177.

30 RIMMON-KENAN, S. *Narrative Fiction: contemporary poetics*. London & New York: Methuen, 1983, p.32.

31 RIMMON-KENAN, ref. 30, p.33.

32 CULLER, ref. 10, p.140.

33 SPARK, M. The religion of an agnostic. In *Church of England Newspaper*, 27 November 1953, p.1. Quoted in chapter 3.3 (ref. 20).

34 CULLER, ref. 10, p.137.

35 KENNEDY, ref. 13, p.86.

Notes to chapter four: cultural attitudes and the idea of place

4.1 Introduction

1 BYRON, Lord G. *Beppo*, stanza 20. In *Byron: poetical works*, ed. F. Page, corrected J. Jump. London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, p.20.

2 SPARK, M. What images return. In *Memoirs Of A Modern Scotland*, ed. K. Miller. (First pub. in *New Statesman*.) London: Faber & Faber, 1970, p.151.

3 BOLD, A. *Muriel Spark*. London & New York: Methuen, 1986, p.65.

1 CULLER, J. *Structuralist Poetics: structuralism, linguistics and the study of literature*. London & Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975, p.141.

2 CULLER, ref. 1, p.142.

3 ISER, W. *The Implied Reader: patterns of communication in prose fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (1972). Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, p.36.

4 HARRISON, B. Muriel Spark and Jane Austen. In *The Modern English Novel: the reader, the writer and the work*, ed. G. Josipovici. London: Open Books, 1976, p.238.

5 BOWIE, M. In the mobile labyrinth: death and anomie beside the Venetian lagoon (review article of *Venice Desired*, T. Tanner; *Watermark*, J. Brodsky; *Paris And The Nineteenth Century*, C. Prendergast). In *The Times Literary Supplement*, 30 April 1993, p.12.

6 PROUST, M. *Swann's Way: part 2* (1913), vol. 2 of *Remembrance Of Things Past*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (1922). London: Chatto & Windus, 1966, p.234.

7 PROUST, ref. 6, p.231-232.

8 PROUST, ref. 6, p.240.

9 BOWIE, ref. 5, p.12.

10 SPARK, M. Introduction. In *A Selection Of Poems By Emily Brontë*. London: The Grey Walls Press, 1952, p.18.

11 BYRON, Lord G. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto 4, stanza 108. In *Byron: poetical works* ed. F. Page, corrected J. Jump. London, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, p.241.

12 BYRON, ref. 11, canto 4, stanza 18, p.229.

13 BYRON, ref. 11, canto 4, stanza 25, p.230.

14 *Don't Look Now*, dir. N. Roeg. UK/Italy: Casey Productions/Eldorado Films, distr. British Lion Films, 1973.

15 BOWIE, ref. 5, p.12.

16 HOLUB, R. *Reception Theory: a critical introduction*. London & New York: Methuen, 1984, p.73.

17 HOLUB, ref. 16, p.81.

4.3 *The Takeover*

1 FRAZER, Sir J. *The Golden Bough: a study in magic and religion*. London: Macmillan, 1922 (abridged ed), p.2.

2 *The First Epistle To Timothy*, chapter 1, verse 4.

3 KNOWLES, C. *Florence And Tuscany*. Brentford: Roger Lascelles, 1992, p.31.

4 FRAZER, ref. 1, p.704.

5 FRAZER, ref. 1, p.8.

6 PLATO, *The Symposium*, trans. W. Hamilton. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951, p.59-60.

7 BYRON, Lord G. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, canto 4, stanza 173. In *Byron: poetical works*, ed. F. Page, corrected J. Jump. London, Oxford & New York: 1970, p.250.

8 *The Acts Of The Apostles*, chapter 19, verse 24.

9 WHITTAKER, R. *The Faith And Fiction Of Muriel Spark*. London: Macmillan, 1982, p.83.

10 PAGE, N. *Muriel Spark*. London: Macmillan, 1990, p.92.

11 BAKHTIN, M. *Problems Of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* (1929), trans. R. W. Rotsel. U.S.A: Ardis, 1973, p.102.

12 BAKHTIN, ref. 11, p.102.

13 BAKHTIN, ref. 11, p.103.

14 BAKHTIN, ref. 11, p.96.

15 GOETHE, J. W. *Italian Journey* (1786-1788), trans. W. H. Auden & E. Mayer (1962). Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970, p.174.

16 GOETHE, ref. 15, p.469-470.

17 BAKHTIN, ref. 11, p.133.

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2 This refers to the passage quoted in chapter one and referenced in note 12.

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6 JAMESON, ref. 5, p.141.

7 TODOROV, ref. 4, p.6.

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5.2 *The Driver's Seat*

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6 CAWELTI, ref. 5, p.8.

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The Driver's Seat. In *Journal Of Narrative Technique*, vol. 15, p.150.

8 ROBBE-GRILLET, A. *The Erasers* (1953), trans. R. Howard. London: Calder & Boyars, 1966, p.127.

9 TOYNBEE, ref. 3, p.73.

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12 ROBBE-GRILLET, ref. 8, p.170.

13 ROBBE-GRILLET, ref. 8, p.168.

14 KERMODE, F. *The Genesis Of Secrecy: on the interpretation of narrative*. Cambridge Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1979, p.91.

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16 ROBBE-GRILLET, ref. 8, p.108.

17 HÜHN, P. The detective as reader: narrativity and reading concepts in detective fiction. In *Modern Fiction Studies*, Autumn 1987, vol. 33, no. 3, p.452.

18 HÜHN, ref. 17, p.464.

19 HÜHN, ref. 17, p.460.

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21 HUME, K. *Fantasy And Mimesis: responses to reality in Western literature*. New York & London: Metuen, 1984, p.126.

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23 KNIGHT, ref. 20, p.103.

24 CAWELTI, ref. 5, p.77.

25 PALMER, ref. 11, p.96.

26 FRYE, ref. 22, p.46.

27 HUME, ref. 21, p.20.

28 HUME, ref. 21, p.57.

29 HUME, ref. 21, p.126.

30 CAWELTI, ref. 5, p.18.

31 KEMP, P. *Muriel Spark*. London: Paul Elek, 1974, p.125.

32 KEMP, ref. 31, p.123.

33 Ruth Whittaker, while discussing *Territorial Rights*, makes a comment on Muriel Spark's narration which may be considered relevant here. She says, '...like Evelyn Waugh, she has withdrawn to a high and distant viewing platform from which she chronicles the activities of the world as she sees them. Like Waugh's, hers is still a Christian perspective, which, paradoxically, saves her from pessimism, since it would be more disturbing to her if a godless world were virtuous'. WHITTAKER, R. *The Faith And Fiction Of Muriel Spark*. London: Macmillan, 1982, p.87. While this describes the stance of the implied author in both novels, it is not legitimate to attribute the effect observed to what is known of the real author's belief. Such an attribution fails to acknowledge that the adoption of a detached perspective is a rhetorical strategy which obliges the reader to ponder the significance of the lack of emotional affect. There is extra-textual information which counters the idea that the author's Christianity protects her from distress, and challenges the assumption that the detachment of the narrative technique reflects her own feelings; Ian Gillham quotes her as saying of *The Driver's Seat*, 'I frightened myself by writing it, but I just had to go on. I gave myself a terrible fright with it. I had to go into hospital to finish it'. GILLHAM, I. Keeping it short - Muriel Spark talks about her books to Ian Gillham. In *The Listener*, 24 September 1970, p.413.

34 CAWELTI, ref. 5, p.93.

35 ROBBE-GRILLET, ref. 8, p.55.

36 BRADBURY, M. Muriel Spark's fingernails. In *Critical Quarterly*, Autumn 1972, vol. 14, no. 3, p.148.

37 Because the theoretical writing of Alain Robbe-Grillet presents a justification of the kind of fiction he was writing its assertiveness is not surprising. One of his key claims is, 'the world is neither meaningful nor absurd. It quite simply *is*'. ROBBE-GRILLET, A. A path for the future novel. In *Snapshots And Towards A New Novel* (1962 & 1963), trans. B. Wright. London: Calder & Boyars, 1965, p.53. However, there is a sentence in *The Erasers*

that indicates a possibility of metaphysical uncertainty absent from his theory: 'Sometimes this happens to lost cities, petrified by some cataclysm for centuries - or only for a few seconds before their collapse, a wink of hesitation between life and what already bears another name: after, before, eternity'. ROBBE-GRILLET, ref. 8, p.79.

38 TOYNBEE, ref. 3, p.73.

39 See *The Mandelbaum Gate*, p.283 & p.177, referred to in chapter 2.3.

40 FRYE, ref. 22, p.222.

41 FRYE, ref. 22, p.42.

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43 FRYE, ref. 22, p.211.

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45 FRYE, ref. 22, p.224.

46 FRYE, ref. 22, p.224.

47 LORD, G. The love letters that Muriel Spark refused to buy. In *Sunday Express*, 4 March 1973, p.6.

48 Howard Jacobson, reviewing *The Oxford Book Of Humorous Prose: from William Caxton to P. G. Wodehouse*, make an interesting observation about the difference between comedy and tragedy which is pertinent to the argument here: 'Tragedy and apocalypse concern themselves with the afterwards. Comedy with the during. Pound for pound, comedy is the crueller. But it is bracing cruelty, bearing the promise at least of intellectual deliverance, an ascendancy of mind and spirit over matter'. JACOBSON, H. Humdrum and airy nothings. In *Times Literary Supplement*, 8-14 June 1990, p.605.

5.3 *Not To Disturb*

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3 KIELY, R. *The Romantic Novel In England*. Cambridge Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 1972, p.41.

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5 SPARK, ref. 4, p.14.

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manner / relation	playful	satirical	serious
transformation	parody	travesty	transposition
imitation	pastiche	caricature	forgery

8 Genette's explanation about the difference with respect to painting helps to clarify this point. Skill is needed to make a good copy of a painting and so this practice has some purpose and value. The difference hinges on the operation of the sign in each case, the 'iconic' or 'motivated' visual sign being distinct from the 'arbitrary' verbal sign.

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27 JACKSON, ref. 22, p.173.

28 JACKSON, ref. 22, p.173.

29 WILT, J. *Ghosts Of The Gothic: Austen, Eliot, and Lawrence*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, p.139.

30 WILT, ref. 29, p.12-13.

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33 HOFFMAN, E. *Lost In Translation: a life in a new language* (1989). London: Minerva, 1991, p.38.

34 HUME, K. See note 13, section 5.1.

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36 This is from *The Contention Of Ajax And Ulysses* (1659), by J. SHIRLEY.

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26 WAUGH, ref. 23, p.89.

27 NORRIS, C. *Deconstruction: theory and practice*. London & New York: Routledge, 1991 (rev. ed.), p.108.

28 LORD, see ref. 47, chapter 5.2.

29 HARRISON, see ref. 35, chapter 2.2.

30 TOYNBEE, see ref. 1, chapter 2.1.

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